

Meditation and Health



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Principles and Practices

**Translated and Edited
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Table of Contents

Translator's Introduction
Wu Fei-k'ung
Huang Ta-pai
Liu Ying-ku
Wang Hsien-ch'ing
Ch'en Tun-fu
Wang Ts'an-wu
Li Tse-min
Li Chin-feng
Wu Ts'eng-lin
Yang Ch'ing-li
Yuan-hua-tzu
Anonymous: Professor of the River
Wang Hua-chen
Liu Ho-chun
Han Chung-kang
Professor Zhu
Teng Hsi
Hou K'un-i
Shen Shu-wen
Ch'en Wu-jen
Ku-yang-tzu
Ma Ho-yang
Li Jen
Mao Chiao-min
Yu An-teng
Lin Sung-ch'ing
Ke Chung-ho
Hsiao T'ien-shih
Father Ou-yang Ching-yu
Lin I-min
Sun Ching-yang
Professor Yuan-tun

Yu Yang-tzu
Yun-you-tzu

Translator's Introduction

With traditions going back thousands of years, Taoism (Daoism) is one of the oldest practical philosophies in the world. Over the ages Taoism has adopted many different forms, using a wide range of terminologies and pursuing a broad spectrum of interests in social, psychological, artistic, scientific, and spiritual concerns.

One of the main branches of scientific interest pursued by Taoists over the ages has been medicine and healing. In its popular outreach to society at large, Taoism is often distinguished by an abiding emphasis on health, well being, and lengthening life.

This book is about Taoist methods of silent healing and life prolongation as they are practiced in modern times.

A fundamental principle of Taoist healing is based on conservation of internal energy to maximize the natural self-renewing capacity of the body's life processes. The aim of the practices is to foster the efficiency of natural recuperative powers by resolving and releasing unnatural inhibitions on their functions imposed by accumulated effects of chronic excesses of expenditure and stress. Restoration and wellness are cultivated by way of calming methods used to dissolve tension and stress and develop feelings of freedom and ease. Conscious breathing is used to refine body awareness in

this process, while other exercises linking mind and body are used to stimulate circulation and promote mental and physical energy.

The health exercises described in this book generally fall into two categories, one conventionally called ‘life’ and the other ‘essence.’ In terms of therapeutic effect, life-oriented exercises influence the mind through the body, while essence-oriented exercises influence the body through the mind. Some exercises work on body and mind together, going in both directions at once. Whichever approach is taken at the outset, depending on individual needs, the goal is balanced integration of these elements, insofar as the effects of silent healing come from the interaction of body and mind.

Taoist practitioners describe two basic approaches to stimulating the healing response, corresponding to these categories of life and essence.

Life exercises stimulate the nervous system to foster new body awareness with enhanced energy, improving circulation and increasing resistance to illness.

Essence exercises promote mental and physical relaxation, reducing stress to help maximize natural recuperative powers.

When combined, these practices are believed to help heal the body, relieve the mind, and lengthen life.

Mind-Body Fusion: Energy Circulation Exercises

The cultivation of energetic awareness of the body for the purposes of health exercises is referred to by special terms alluding to internal mind-body experiences, commonly called the opening, or clearing, of channels, apertures, and passes.

In terms of sensation, the energy channels may be described as lines of awareness, while the apertures (or openings) and passes may be described as points of awareness and spaces of awareness. Focus on these lines, points, and spaces produces special states of consciousness and body awareness used for energizing and healing.

There are many variations in usage and application of these so-called channels, apertures, and passes, but the basic system from which these variations are derived is essentially the same.

Taoist practitioners who work with energy channels generally refer to two, three, or eight channels. Most such exercises begin with opening the two principal channels known as the active and passive channels.

It is held that the other channels may open spontaneously after the active and passive channels are opened, so there are many cases where these two are the only channels actually mentioned in a given exercise or program.

In general terms, the active channel is sensed as following the spine from the base of the torso up to head. The passive channel follows the

corresponding route from the head down the front of the body, rejoining the active channel at the base of the torso.

Circulation of energy up the active channel and down the passive channel is metaphorically referred to as activation of the ‘waterwheel,’ this association being intended to convey the image of energy being brought up and poured down in a repeated cycle within the body.

The circulation of energy through the channels is initiated by opening the apertures and passes, which are key points along the channels.

These apertures and passes are opened by storing internal energy in critical points in the network called elixir fields. These elixir fields are located in the abdomen, thorax, and head, sensitive areas where Taoist practitioners who use this system focus their attention to collect and cull energetic sensations.

Apart from the active and passive channels, the other channels are mentioned less frequently. The thrusting channel is in the center of the body, between the active and passive channel, going directly from the perineum to the top of the head. The girdling channel circles the body around the waist, curving down from about two inches below the ribs at the sides to the level of the bladder in front.

The other four channels run from the feet into the head: two go up the outsides of the legs and along the sides, shoulders, and neck; two go up

the insides of the legs and along the abdominal muscles, chest, and throat.

In terms of awareness, these tie the limbs to the torso of the energetic body-sense, creating long lines of continuity of consciousness that can be used to cultivate grace and economy of movement, increasing strength and efficiency without increasing energy expenditure.

Just as there is no material medicine in any system without limitations and possible side effects, there are also standing controversies and cautions connected with Taoist practices and experiences associated with opening energy channels, apertures, and passes. This is not peculiar to Taoism, as similar caveats surround the use of parallel systems in other traditions, just as critical caveats attend the employment of all ordinary medicines, even something as seemingly simple as aspirin, as well as every kind of energy in everyday use, from electricity to combustion to nuclear fission. In the practical context of healing, the critical issue is whether or to what degree a certain method will effectively help a particular person to be well.

In Taoism it is generally recognized that this is a question of fact, which therefore differs according to individual constitutions and conditions. These variables have given rise to many differences in actual practice. Those who contemplate using any of the exercises described herein are therefore advised to discuss them with their health care

providers. Well-known systems such as T'ai-chi-ch'uan are referred to generically, as instruction in their forms is widely available.

The nonphysical and mentally formless element of Taoist healing is customarily treated with less reserve, for several reasons. It is commonly considered safer and less conducive to harmful side effects. What is more, this nonmaterial element is also a necessary ingredient of the energetic and physical dimension of healing.

This is the meditative dimension of Taoist practice where Taoism and Ch'an Buddhism intersect, so there are also many references to Buddhist findings in connection with essence-oriented exercises.

As a practical approach to life, Taoism is preeminently a path of peace and well being, perhaps for the very reason that its philosophy was forged in the midst of chronic warfare and destruction. This book contains translations from conversations of 20th century Taoists, who like many of their spiritual ancestors lived through times of turmoil and total warfare.

Wu Fei-k'ung

A man of unknown origins, Wu Fei-k'ung was known for his deep learning and literary skill. Specializing in Buddhist and Taoist studies, he wrote for various journals. His instructions on quiet sitting, a basic Taoist healing practice, are particularly extensive and detailed, providing a useful introduction to the subject.

Before and After Quiet Sitting

Before quiet sitting, loosen your garments and belt. When finished sitting, open your eyes slowly and stretch your arms and legs without haste. Gently rub your hands together to warm them, then cover your eyes and rub them. Massage your head, neck, chest, abdomen, back, and limbs, extending to the whole body.

The Environment for Quiet Sitting

It is best to prepare a quiet room; otherwise, it is all right to practice quiet sitting in bed. However, a wooden bed is preferable; a spring bed is not appropriate.

The Period of Quiet Sitting

When profoundly accomplished in quiet sitting, you reach the limit of its subtlety only when you keep attentive no matter what you are doing, whether walking around, standing still, sitting, or lying down. Beginners, however, ought to set a certain time. Normally it is good to sit in the early morning when you wake up and at night before you go to bed. Otherwise, you'll need to sit at least once a day.

The longer you sit quietly each time the better; but don't consciously try to extend the period. For beginners, thirty minutes is usual; after that you can gradually increase it.

For busy people, forty minutes each time will do; if you can extend it to an hour, that's even better.

Morning, noon, and night are all suitable, but if you only sit once a day, then early morning after rising is best.

If you sit for fifteen to twenty minutes every night before going to sleep, that too will be quite effective.

Beginners should not strain. On workdays you may get up at five in the morning and sit quietly for a couple of hours, then sit quietly for an hour at nine o'clock in the evening, then sit continuously for three hours on Sunday, or one hour each morning, noon and night.

If you have no time to sit quietly when you get up in the morning, then you can do it before you retire at night. If you sit before retiring, however, the fatigue of the day will make you prone to drowsiness. This is not as good as the clarity in the morning when you rise.

If you are going to sit quietly after a meal, wait at least twenty minutes to half an hour.

There is no harm in quiet sitting before a meal.

Quiet Sitting and Diet

The work progresses faster on a vegetarian diet.

Quiet Sitting and Sleep

It is best to sleep a full eight hours.

The ultimate achievement of quiet sitting is basically better than sleep. Those of profound achievement can go without sleep all year long, but beginners should be natural and not try to force it.

In quiet sitting, the spirit is gathered inside, whereas in sleep the spirit is dispersed outside; in principle, therefore, quiet sitting would naturally be beneficial, but to determine that in actuality still depends on the depth of accomplishment in practice.

Quiet Sitting and Exercise

Systems like Easing the Sinews and Eight Step Brocade are external work; practicing these can help quiet sitting.

Quiet sitting and martial arts can be practiced together. T'ai Chi Ch'uan is best.

When achievement in quiet sitting is profound, it is no harm to give up the physical exercise; ultimately, however, it is better to practice them together.

Quiet Sitting and Breathing

There are two methods of breathing: one is called natural breathing, the other is called reverse breathing.

Natural Breathing

When inhaling, breathe through the nose, gradually expanding the lower abdomen. When exhaling, breathe out through the nose, drawing in the lower abdomen.

Exhalation and inhalation should equally be gradual, deep, and long, reaching the lower abdomen, causing the abdomen to be tight and full.

Respiration should gradually become finer, going out and in extremely subtly.

Practice this repeatedly, and after a long time, without realizing it, you will spontaneously enter a state where there is no perceptible exhalation or inhalation.

Reverse Breathing

Inhalation should be deep and long, with the chest expanding and the lower abdomen contracting.

Exhalation should be gentle and long, with the lower abdomen expanding. The area below the navel fills with energy, while the chest empties and relaxes.

Principles for Application of Both Natural Breathing and Reverse Breathing

Breathing should be extremely quiet and subtle, such that you yourself don't hear its sound.

Sit in the same posture as quiet sitting

The breath should be gentle, fine, and long, slowly pouring into the lower abdomen.

Breath is gradually lengthened, until you can occupy a full minute with one exhalation and one inhalation. Do not, however, try to force it under any circumstances.

This can be practiced anytime every day. It is best to practice it while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down.

When quiet sitting, there should be no thought or cogitation at all; if you concentrate attention on the breathing, then the mind cannot be quiet; so you should practice this before and after quiet sitting.

To practice breathing, select a place where the air is fresh, and practice for five to fifteen minutes.

When first learning, if the solar plexus is tight and stiff, then breathing is hindered because the diaphragm cannot move freely.

When you have practiced for a long time, you'll seem to feel the chest open and relaxed; the breathing is quiet, subtle, deep, and long, and can reach directly to the lower abdomen below the navel. This is evidence that the solar plexus has relaxed.

When you breath in, the diaphragm rises; when you exhale, the diaphragm falls—reverse breathing gets the beginner to exercise the diaphragm with comparative ease.

When practicing quiet sitting, one should only focus attention on an elixir field, not on breathing.

When you practice breathing exercises outdoors, or when you practice before and after quiet sitting, it's all right to exert some effort; that is not so, however, once you get into a state of quiet. The lower abdomen should always be expanded, but this shouldn't be forced.

Quiet Sitting and Mental States

Let go of everything; don't entertain random thoughts.

Using the method of reflective awareness, make random thoughts spontaneously stop occurring. When thought A occurs, inwardly become aware of it so that you don't cling to it and encourage it; then thought A will be empty. The same goes for thought B. Straighten the root, clear the source, and eventually random thoughts will naturally cease to occur.

Even thoughts of healing or of health should be set aside; don't mull over them.

Just rely wholly on nature, and don't seek rapid results. Be like a boat floating in the middle of the river, without oar or sail, going wherever it goes.

When sitting, ignore outside sounds.

Leaving your eyes unfocused, keep your attention on the lower field.

Gathering mental attention, inwardly be aware of the lower field, exhaling here, inhaling here. Practice this for a long time, and outwardly your abdomen will expand and become very elastic, while inwardly your being will be harmonious and your mood peaceful, without thought or worry, like the bright moon in the sky, without the slightest obstruction. If you reach

the state where the spirit does not run outside, then it is imperative not to concentrate as before, but just go along with its naturalness and silently be aware of it. Gradually you will reach the subtle state of spiritual purity where there is no other and no self.

The lower field is 1.3 inches below the navel, but when you practice inward awareness you only need to focus attention on the general area below the navel—it's not necessary to be too particular about the measurement.

Other than this, if you keep your attention on the openings in the crown of the head, on the hairline, between the eyebrows, on the tip of the nose, inside the navel, in the perineum, the coccyx, the bottom of the feet, and so on, the idea is the same as the elixir field, but each has its drawbacks and is not as safe as focusing on the elixir field.

Method of Watching the Breathing

Inwardly watch over the exhalation and inhalation; when a thought comes along, keep watching steadily, and the thought will stop.

Method of Counting the Breaths

One exhalation and one inhalation together constitute one breath. Mentally count your breaths from one to five breaths, ten breaths, a hundred breaths, even all the way up to a thousand breaths. Keep this one thought, not entertaining any other thoughts. If you get disturbed by random thoughts midway, then start the count over again from the beginning. When you get to the point where the breath is so subtle it cannot be counted, or you weary of the bother and pay no attention to numbers, then you can stop counting. At this point, thoughts spontaneously stop.

When you practice quiet sitting, you need to have firm faith, like a religious person; then it will eventually be very effective. So whether or not there are results depends entirely upon faith.

It is not at all easy to reach the state where the mind is thoroughly clear, without any pollution at all. It is necessary to minimize activities during the day, and sit as long as an hour or two. One may sometimes achieve this without being able to sustain it.

Introductory Methods of Quiet Sitting

There are two introductory methods of quiet sitting: one is concentrating on the lower elixir field; another is gazing fixedly at the tip of the nose. One may choose freely between these two.

Explanation of the elixir field comes from ancient books. Some say it is 1.3 inches below the navel, but some just speak generally of below the navel, without any specific measurement. Those who practice quiet sitting should focus the mind on the central area below the navel, doing the practice without getting obsessed with precise measurement. This way one can be flexible and not stuck on forms.

If you can progress in quiet breathing, then the movement of the abdomen becomes so subtle it can hardly be noticed.

Gazing at the elixir field while sitting properly means using the ‘inner gaze.’ The so-called ‘inner gazing with the eyes closed’ is a matter of using the mind as an eye, or using the will as an eye. So inner gazing does not require you to gaze downward with your eyes, but just to focus your attention downward.

When sitting, mentally close your ears and listen inwardly to the exit and entry of your exhalation and inhalation. Then even if you hear sounds nearby, it is as if you don't hear.

If the attention is focused entirely on the lower abdomen, then the solar plexus feels open and relaxed, as if there were nothing there. This is called descending. The power of concentration can actually reach the lower abdomen; it is not just a matter of keeping a concept in mind.

When sitting, attention is focused on the lower abdomen. According to a universal rule of psychology, the more clearly the attention is focused on one spot, naturally the more easily extraneous random thoughts are dispelled.

Concentration on the spot between the eyebrows is also practiced by one Taoist sect; it can bring quick results. Time and again they teach people to gaze at the nose and concentrate on the spot between the brows, and before ten days have passed they see light like the sun before their eyes, gradually growing until it can envelop the whole body. However, this method is rather forced, and not too natural. Furthermore, the center of gravity of a human being should be in the lower body, and should not be moved to the top.

If you hold firm to one thought for a long time without slacking, one day you will surely overcome random thoughts.

If you can forget sickness when sick, that is most marvelous.

Postures for Quiet Sitting

The upper body should be straight and upright. The buttocks should protrude somewhat, but this should not be consciously forced. The chest leans slightly forward, while the lower abdomen should be settled.

Double coil sitting is called the full lotus posture in Buddhism. There are two ways of doing it. The first way is to put the right foot on the left thigh and then the left foot on the right thigh. This is called demon quelling sitting; when you sit you are naturally upright and do not lean forwards or backwards or right or left. This is the advantage of the double coil. The other way is to put the left foot on the right thigh first, and then the right foot on the left thigh. This is called auspicious sitting.

Single coil sitting is called the half lotus posture in Buddhism. Here you just put the left foot on the right thigh, or the right foot on the left thigh. In this posture, when the left foot is on the right thigh, the left kneecap will be up in the air, not resting firmly on the cushion, so one may readily tend to lean to the right. When the right foot is on the left thigh, the same applies in the opposite direction. If beginners cannot do the double coil, then the single coil is appropriate; if you can pay attention so that your body does not lean, then the effect is the same.

Uncoiled sitting is used when there is no way to sit even in single coil style, as when someone is elderly or overweight. Uncoiled sitting means simply sitting cross legged. In this posture it is easy to tilt and lean, so you should pay attention and correct it from time to time.

Ordinary sitting can be used when the aforementioned postures are too difficult. In this style you sit upright on a chair or a bench without folding the legs. The palms of the hands are placed on the kneecaps, while the feet rest evenly on the ground.

Reclining style can be used when one is weak or sick or it is inconvenient to sit. There are also those who insist that reclining style is good for beginners

when they first start quiet sitting. There are two forms of this practice; lying face up and lying on the side. Lying face up is like ordinary reclining, with the head slightly elevated. Lying on the side differs from left to right. Lying on the left side puts pressure on the heart, so it would seem it is not appropriate. As for the posture when lying on the right side, the head and upper body bend slightly forward, the right leg is bent forward, and the left leg lies on top of the right leg, but with the lower leg bent back to rest on the bed. The left hand, slightly curved, is placed palm down on the left thigh, while the right hand is placed palm up on the pillow next to the head. When practicing quietness lying down, it is very easy to doze off, so best pay timely attention. The proper measure is to be as if asleep yet not asleep, clearly awake and alert.

When the eyes are closed the mind is quiet, but because of the fatigue of the day, at night it is best to have the eyes slightly opened to avoid drowsiness. Otherwise, if you do keep your eyes closed, then use the method of inner gazing.

When you sit quietly for a long time, it is hard to avoid having your legs get numb. Just as when beginning physical training, there is bound to be some pain in the joints. There are two things that can be done for this. One,

when the numbness becomes unbearable, then slowly stretch out the legs and sit in the ordinary sitting posture, or else stop sitting altogether.

Second, when your legs become so numb you can't feel anything at all, eventually they'll return to normal. When you've gone through this a number of times, eventually you can sit for an hour or two without numbness. If you massage your legs with your hands after sitting, that is even better.

Whether you use the single or double coil sitting style, the cushion under the buttocks should be somewhat elevated, and there shouldn't be pressure on the testicles.

While sitting, the tongue rests on the upper palate; you may also use the tongue to stimulate the palate to work up saliva to swallow.

The expression 'steady the lower abdomen' refers to when the abdomen is always extended and never contracts. This superior state can only be reached after long cultivation; it is not easy for beginners to attain it.

'The Way is modeled on Nature.' This applies to everything, including both physiological and psychological aspects. If you want the small of the back

to be straight, then you have to use double coil sitting. When sitting, the small of the back should not be forced too straight—just correct it attentively when you feel the spine sagging, that's all.

When accomplishment in quiet sitting is profound and the energy channels in the body flow freely, then whether or not your posture is correct is not an important issue.

In quiet sitting you may keep your eyes open or closed—either method will do, applied as appropriate.

Effects of Quiet Sitting

When you've practiced for a long time, you seem to feel your diaphragm open and relaxed.

When you've sat for a long time, your lower abdomen below the navel produces a kind of vibration.

Ten-plus days before the vibration, you will feel a heat moving around below your navel.

When this heat has moved around a long time, suddenly it will produce a kind of vibration, which can make the whole body vibrate. When this happens, don't be alarmed; just let it be, naturally. (note: This vibration phenomenon doesn't appear in some people.)

The rapidity and duration of the vibration varies from person to person; it always occurs naturally, and should neither be sought nor suppressed.

When the vibration occurs, use attention (not force) to guide this electric power from the coccyx up the spine to the head. Then it passes through the head and descends gradually from the face to the chest to the navel.

Usually when one has practiced quietness for a month or so, one will suddenly feel heat in some part of the body, coming on like a flash of lightning. Eventually it pervades the whole body, to the point where one perspires.

While sitting quietly, the mind like still water, the genital organ may suddenly become erect; at such times, don't be startled—keep your attention on the elixir field, and let it be, naturally.

When quiet sitting, if the body moves from side to side, this can be considered evidence of effectiveness. So for quiet sitting to be effective, it is not necessary to experience vibration, and not necessary to produce heat.

When the heat descends from the top of the head via the face, returning to the elixir field, let it happen naturally, and eventually you will succeed.

Some people never experience vibration, yet they still obtain the effect of healing illness. That is enough to show that the question of whether or not there is vibration differs depending on the physical constitution of the individual.

Sometimes the throat seems as if it were shut off. This happens all the time when the three fields in the front of the body are not in communication. After the three fields are connected, from throat to chest to abdomen is relaxed, without any stiffness.

Sometimes the elixir field is hot, sometimes not. Sometimes the electrical power is strong, sometimes it is weak. In any case, let it be as is, without seeking quick results, and eventually you will naturally be able to increase the heat, becoming able to elicit it as soon as you start sitting.

When the power of concentration enters the abdomen, the body may sometimes sway. Don't try to restrain it; even if the swaying is intense, it is still no harm.

Eventually you will be able to return to stillness spontaneously.

When saliva is produced in the mouth during quiet sitting, this is a good sign; it should be swallowed gradually, in several swallows.

There's no harm in forcing yourself to sit for a long time if you can endure it, but it won't do to force too hard.

If energy leaks out or rises up after sitting or while sitting, this is evidence of the free flowing of energy and blood; this is also a good sign.

When the heat in the elixir field while sitting is very subtle, that is because the work is still shallow; eventually it will progress from subtle to obvious.

Some people's bodies become soft and warm all over as soon as they begin to sit, without any more vibration. This shows that vibration is a

phenomenon that occurs with the initial penetration of the three passes.

When a great force pours downward in the body, this is a very good sign; gradually guide it with the attention to make it rise from the coccyx along the spine.

When energy flows downward directly to the anus, this is a good sign. Don't be glad about it, however; just let it happen naturally. When the energy is full, it's all right to gently guide it up the spine with the attention, but just don't use force.

Rumbling in the belly, belching, and farting are all evidence of energy coursing in the body. After quiet sitting, circulation in the blood vessels is unimpeded; if the body, hands, and feet are warm, even sweating, these are good signs.

Rumbling in the belly is not accidental; it is produced by energy returning to the abdomen. Eventually, when practice deepens and energy flows freely, then this rumbling will naturally no longer occur.

When energy flows downward while sitting, use attention to concentrate it in the lower abdomen, but don't foster the flow.

The beginning practice of quiet sitting is not the same for men and women.

The lower elixir field in men is an opening of emptiness, without actual anatomical existence, but perceived subjectively by practitioners of inner gazing; therefore there is no harm in keeping attention on it. If women keep attention on the lower field, they will get cancer, or their wombs will be suffused with blood, which is very dangerous. Therefore when women practice quiet sitting they should begin with practices such as contemplation of emptiness, or the method of Guan Yin.

Psychological Effects of Quiet Sitting

Through quiet sitting, it is possible to sleep through the night without dreaming. This state is quite difficult to attain; it is a major effect of quiet sitting.

Perspiration eliminates waste from the body, so one should let it be. When the heat is at its peak, then use attention to guide it up the back to the crown of the head, then from the crown back to the belly, beginning again when

this cycle is complete, going round and round like a waterwheel conveying water.

When heat comes from the edge of the brow, and light appears before the eyes, these are good signs. It is possible to produce heat and vibration wherever the mind is concentrated along the circulation route of the passive and active channels. Whenever there is heat there is light; when it occurs in the head, it is easy to perceive visually. But one should focus on the elixir field, letting everything occur naturally, not fixating on anything.

Remarks

The spot 1.3 inches below the navel is not the elixir field, nor is it the energy opening; it does not seem to be connected with the route of the water wheel. If you concentrate fixedly on this spot, it will produce a number of ailments.

As I see it, the real energy opening extends to the limitless above and the bottomless below; for the exact location, please examine closely.

No matter which opening it is, do not concentrate fixedly, or it will be hard to avoid producing illness. If you can be as if present while seeming absent, neither forgetting nor fostering, aware without attending, attentive without attending, relaxed and natural, carrying out nothing to do, that is excellent!

There are generally three states engendered by sitting practice: confused, chaotic, and clear.

When a practitioner's head remains warm as before in quiet sitting, this is because the work of 'restoring vitality to repair the brain' is still incomplete. When it is completed, then the head is cool, as the energy can spontaneously descend to the center of the body.

The body should not be too bent or too straight—in sum, it is best to be natural in all sitting postures.

Practitioners should never be either eager or complacent. If they are, they will either stagnate or become obsessed.

If you don't focus on openings, then even if you practice quiet sitting for thirty years you still may not necessarily be able to clear the passive and active energy channels. Yet focus on openings can also easily produce fixations, and fixation produces sickness. Therefore the proper application depends on the individual.

During quiet sitting, just be aware; don't adjust the breathing. 'Tuning the breathing requires tuning breathing without breathing.' Tuning without tuning is true tuning. Therefore one should set apart some time apart from quiet sitting to practice tuning the breathing; or it can even be practiced anywhere anytime.

There is a method of practice in Indian yoga wherein the practitioner sets a mirror in front of himself when quiet sitting and gazes with concentrated mind at the 'self' in the mirror. It is easy to stop thoughts this way; that is its merit. However, it is difficult to avoid pathological dissociation; that is its drawback.

In quiet sitting, what is most essential is that the vital spirit be gathered inside; the greatest taboo is for the vital spirit to scatter outside. Since the

states engendered by meditation all cause the vital spirit to scatter outwardly, it is not good to focus attention on them.

Huang Ta-pai

Huang Ta-pai took up the study of Taoism in midlife. Formerly manager of a company, he later took up a reclusive life in a Taoist monastery and became a skilled artist. In his Thirty-Six rules he presents one of the most explicit summaries of the 'water-wheel' technique available in popular Taoist literature.

Mr. Huang's Thirty-Six Rules

When learning quiet sitting, first it is necessary to correct the posture, then place mental focus on the lower abdomen.

Make every effort to stop random thoughts.

Gaze within, that is to say 'turn the light of awareness around to shine back' into the lower abdomen.

Do not, however, concentrate too hard; just be habitually aware of the lower abdomen.

When you first go into sitting, keep to the teaching and practice with a firm heart, not giving up without seeing results.

When you first learn quiet sitting, your breathing is naturally uneven; don't try to regulate it forcibly. Just keep attention on the lower abdomen, and your breathing will spontaneously become deep and even.

During quiet sitting, don't concentrate attention too hard, yet don't ever be inattentive.

When you fixate attention, you fall into 'existence.' When inattentive, you fall into 'emptiness.' These are both wrong. (Watch out!) You should imagine that everything is 'nonexistent,' so you don't even feel the 'existence' of your own body, leaving only a point of attention in the lower field without obsession, without thought or cogitation—this is the proper way to practice quiet sitting.

Sometimes random thoughts suddenly appear—this means attention has slacked off. (Beware!) Gather attention into the lower abdomen at once, and random thoughts will spontaneously disappear.

Sometimes you suddenly see hallucinations, such as of people, or of flowers—this means attention has submerged. (Watch out!) Check the attention, and hallucinations will disappear of themselves.

Once repair of the body is completed, a mass of positive energy fills the lower abdomen, keeping it warm as a spring day all the time. When you are in this condition, you should still sit quietly as before. When it gets to the point where the lower abdomen cannot contain the positive energy, then that energy, which is like a pearl of fire, will seek a way to an opening. If it thrusts upward, there will be pressure at the heart, and it will not be able to expand; so it runs down to the urethra, surging directly into the genitals. At this time, close the urethra tightly, not letting the energy leak out.

Once the urethra is shut, the thrust goes down through the rectal area. At this point the rectum should be clenched tightly to avoid letting the energy out.

Since the rectum is shut, the force will thrust into the coccyx. At this point you should mentally guide it to pass through the coccyx.

Sometimes the firing (that is the effort or work) is insufficient. Attention is like fire; where the mind's attention goes, there is fire. The firing process of the alchemical classics refers to the function of the attention. If the positive energy is not full, when it reaches the coccyx it is not strong enough to pass through. One must not force it to pass, however, but rather return the attention to the lower abdomen and sit quietly as before, producing and refining the energy.

When the energetic potential stirs again, with a force like a pearl of fire, and again reaches the coccyx, guide it with the attention as before, to bring it through the pass.

Whether in one try or many, eventually you will succeed in penetrating the pass.

When it passes through the coccyx, this mass of heat reaches the mid-spine, where it seeks to pass through as before. This is the second pass.

Make the energy pass through here if you can; if not, then return attention to the lower abdomen as before, and sit quietly as before until it is filled with energy.

Guide the energy with the attention again.

Once it has passed the mid-spine, this mass of heat goes up to the back of the head, which is referred to as the third pass. Now guide it with the attention as before, to make it pass through the back of the head and enter the upper field in the brain.

Make the heat pass through if you can; if not, then return the attention to the lower abdomen as before until the appropriate moment, then carry out the method of guiding it through the first two passes.

Once it has gone through the three passes, then lead this mass of heat through the head behind the mid-brow, down the nose and throat right to the center of the thorax.

From the lower abdomen, up the spine, through the brain, and down the nose and throat to the solar plexus, is the complete passage of the passive and active channels; when you have induced energy to circulate this route, the process of going through the passes and ingesting energy is done. Now

you should just keep unified attention continuous, maintaining it permanently without dispersal.

Not only when sitting quietly, but also when walking, eating and drinking, and even lying down and sleeping, you should never let attention slack off. Once attention disperses, positive energy no longer emerges. It is like boiling water in a cauldron on a stove; as long as the fire is bright there is plenty of steam, but if the fire goes out there is no steam. Likening attention to fire is not an arbitrary association. An alchemical classic says, 'Watch out lest the water go dry or the fire go cold.' The water refers to vital energy, the fire refers to attention.

After this comes abstention from grain, great stabilization, and thence on to projection of the spirit. When projecting the spirit, you still turn attention inward to the lower two fields, the solar plexus and lower abdomen, arousing positive energy to compensate for insufficiency in the embryonic spirit.

When the embryonic spirit has enough energy, it is bright and clear, like the moon in the sky. While sitting, it suddenly seems as if snowflakes were

flying before the eyes—this means the time for projecting the spirit has arrived.

At this point, move the spirit to the brain, and imagine yourself ascending from the top of your head into open space.

Guiding it by imagination and attention over and over again, if you can project the spirit do so; if not, then concentrate on the lower two fields, the solar plexus and lower abdomen as before, awaiting the opportunity again.

When the timing is right, then guide with attention as before; eventually you will become able to project the spirit. Once the yang spirit has emerged, then you have a body outside your body; this is called the reality body. This is the indestructible being. Only when you have arrived at this point is the work done; you escape the miseries of the mundane whirl and become an unsurpassed realized human. Even so, you should still practice the work of nurturing, so once the yang spirit has emerged, you should withdraw it right away.

After withdrawing the yang spirit, then repeat the practice of tuning the spirit and training it to leave the physical body.

Practicing like this every day, the work of quiet sitting consists simply of keeping the spirit in the upper field, in the brain.

After the yang spirit leaves the body, there are a number of ‘spiritual capacities,’ but by no means should you rejoice in this account. Outwardly revealing a ray of light, you should embrace the Tao and plunge into silence, nurturing carefully.

When the yang spirit leaves the physical shell, at first don’t let it go too far. First let it go one or two steps, then withdraw it; after that, let it go ten or twenty steps and then withdraw it. If you go from near to far, you may avoid the problems of getting lost.

Some may consider the work of cultivation completed once the yang spirit is out, but in reality it is not so. Generally speaking, projection of the yang spirit through quiet sitting is a systematic contrivance and is done prematurely, so past habits may be hard to extirpate; thus one will have an indestructible body without yet having an immutable nature—this is comprehending life without having comprehended essence. Therefore, after projecting the spirit one should still sit quietly. The method of sitting

is as before, just keeping the point of awareness of the yang spirit in the upper field in the brain without obsession, keeping centered.

Gradually you get to where you don't even hold to the 'center,' and there is no more 'method.' You just keep a single clear emptiness, merging with cosmic space.

Eventually even cosmic space isn't there; reality and space merge.

Emptying and emptying, nullifying and nullifying, emptying and nullifying until there is nothing to empty or nullify, you finally reach the ultimate. At this time empty nothingness is original nature, original nature merges with empty space; the spiritual being is thoroughly pure, based on the 'ancestral energy.' When practice of the Way reaches here, this is called excelling the unexcelled; if you reach this while alive, this is called before the beginningless. This is true fulfillment.

The process of clearing the eight channels, beginning from the passive and active channels, is in the domain of biological training, to use modern terminology; this is what we call working on life.

The state where ‘the eight winds blowing cannot move you’ is in the domain of psychological construction, to use modern terminology; this is what we call working on essence.

Those who cultivate the Way should work on both essence and life together, without partiality. Otherwise, it will be difficult to avoid bringing on illness or getting fixated obsessions. What alchemical books call ‘dual cultivation of essence and life’ is in reality no more than this.

‘When you see the weird as not strange, the weirdness self-destructs.’

‘When demons come, the demons are cut down; when Buddhas come, the Buddhas are cut down.’ When you get fixated on an obsession, be sure to remember these sayings!

Generally speaking, the revelations and actions manifested by immortals and Buddhas in dreams are often illusory images, so practitioners should not be too quick to believe in them as true.

Chinese alchemical literature is vast and unorganized, so it’s hard to understand without wide study and thorough investigation. Why don’t people with profound learning in Taoism come forth to organize it?

In ancient times there was a man of high realization whose nose ran. When a fellow called it to his attention and asked him why he didn't wipe his nose, he replied, "Where can I find the spare time?" That is to say, during the period of nurturing, the spirit does not run outside, so there is no time to pay attention to other things. It is not only on the path of Immortalism that one forgets the external while working on the internal.

Intellectual activity may burst out uncontrollably. In olden times great master Han-shan once suffered from this 'meditation sickness.' When one experiences this, it is necessary to lie down for two days before those thoughts stop. Therefore, once they attain stabilization and spiritualization, those who cultivate realization should then 'be as if ignorant though very wise,' and 'be intelligent without exploiting it,' so they can 'take a step forward from the top of the hundred-foot pole.' If they talk about mysteries and marvels, showing off their spiritual perceptions, once their electricity has leaked they regress in their work.

At present, according to my knowledge, there are still people of high attainment in a certain area. There are also those who belong to the class of spiritual immortals living on a certain mountain. These are what are called

‘earthly spiritual immortals.’ They can transform at will, so no one can find them out.

The author of Yin-shih-tzu’s Method of Quiet Sitting may have cleared the eight extra channels, but his crown gate had not opened, so the yang spirit could not get out. If the yang spirit does not come out, it is impossible to attain the reality body—how can one merge with space and complete the final step of the work, ‘refining spirit into openness’? In his later years, Yin-shih-tzu abandoned Taoism to study Esoteric Buddhism; though in time the gate opened, ultimately his wish went unfulfilled and he died in his eighties. Summing up his lifetime achievement on the Way, after all it was not more than ‘repelling disease and extending life span.’ What a pity!

Repairing the body is the work of the minor cycle; projecting the spirit is the work of the major cycle.

After the energy circuit is cleared, just be natural, and practice will advance spontaneously.

‘Real firing basically has no period; the great medicine is not quantified.’

‘The Way follows Nature.’ Practitioners of spiritual alchemy should not be

too concerned about the ‘firing period.’

The whole process of cultivating realization may be summed up as follows:

1. The stage of repairing the body, wherein blood goes through the passes.
2. The stage of changing the body, wherein energy goes through the passes.
3. The stage of projecting the spirit, wherein inside and outside merge, and there is a body outside the body.
4. The stage of returning to space: the basic essence is space, space is the basic essence.

If the yang energy cannot get through the passes, do not try to force it through. Just focus on maintaining it, and when the energy is sufficient it will spontaneously go through the passes. What does maintaining mean? It means that pure mental focus does not slack off no matter what you are doing.

At the stage of projecting the spirit, you move the spirit to the upper field, and then concentrate on doing ‘work on essence.’ What is the upper field? It is what is now referred to as the ‘pituitary gland.’

If you draw a horizontal line between the temples, then draw a straight line through the middle, the center of the cross thus formed is the region of the pituitary gland. Alchemical literature calls this the ‘nirvana chamber.’

In males, the back is yang, while the chest is yin. In females, it is the opposite—the back is yin while the chest is yang. Therefore the methods of practice for males and females are not entirely the same.

When you practice during the night hours of the ox (1-3 am) and the tiger (3-5 am), after sitting it is basically not good to go back to sleep. If you feel tired and drained, or if you’re worried that you’ll suffer from lack of sleep on the job the next day, then it’s all right to go back to sleep for a while. But before you go back to sleep you should do some like exercise, like eight step brocade or t’ai-chi-ch’uan, or else take a walk, in order to disperse the energy and blood pooled in the lower abdomen in the course of quiet sitting.

There are many openings in the body on which one may keep the attention, but the method of keeping the attention on the ‘lower alchemical field’ is the most satisfactory. Even if there is no enlightened teacher around to give

guidance, if one proceeds with courage there will be no untoward side-effects.

Keeping attention on the opening in the space between the mouth and the nose is certainly a marvelous method, but if one rouses ordinary heat through anger, or else brings up polluted energy because the mind is impure, it can easily produce strange incurable ailments. Practitioners ought to beware of this.

Keeping the attention on an opening while sitting is not the same for everyone. For some it is better to keep the attention on a certain opening, while for others it is better to keep the attention on another opening. Ultimately the only way to tell which opening a practitioner should focus on is through the guidance of an enlightened teacher and one's own investigation and understanding. Generally speaking, virgins should focus on the 'upper field,' while the sexually experienced should focus on the 'lower field.' This is a common rule for focus on openings.

'When there is no thought, only then are you quiet; within quietude, energy is spontaneously peaceful. When energy is peaceful, breathing is stabilized. When breathing is stabilized, you naturally return to the root.

When you return to the root, you see basic essence; when you see essence, that is realization.’ This is a famous statement of Ancestor Lu.

During quiet sitting, the eyes should be partially closed, not completely shut. Also, you should burn a stick of incense, or hang a small light, just enough for a ray of light, so you can reflect silently taking in the light; then you will be clearly aware, and excellent states will spontaneously appear. If you sit in pitch darkness, that is called ‘blind cultivation’—what benefit is there in it?

‘Getting rid of falsehood, returning to reality’ is common to Buddhism and Taoism. Practitioners of Taoism should also study Buddhist scriptures and classics.

Deep breathing is also a kind of exercise for strengthening the body; it ought to be practiced as a complement to quiet sitting. When breathing in, the lower belly gradually rises; when breathing out, the belly gradually sinks in. If your only purpose is health, then it’s enough just to practice deep breathing.

In quiet sitting, what is most essential is to have no thoughts; the style of sitting doesn't matter.

Womb breathing is like the function of what is now called a 'vacuum.'

The alchemical pill is a crystallization. 'When remembrance of Buddha is wholehearted, this is the alchemical pill.' There are many ways of crystallizing the pill, not only the method of alchemy spoken of by the Wu-Yang sect!

Liu Ying-ku

Little is known of Liu Ying-ku, except that he was from Chekiang and was highly reclusive. Li Lo-ch'iu, the compiler of these interviews, was only able to meet him once.

Exhaling in the elixir field, inhaling in the elixir field, 'continuously, on the verge of being, employing it without stress,' this is the right way of practice.

The essential task of quiet sitting is a matter of gathering in the light and transmuting energy. The 'light' is spirit. Spirit is essence, energy is life. Solidifying the spirit and gathering energy is called 'dual cultivation of essence and life.' Therefore it is said, 'Set the spirit on one point, and there is nothing that cannot be accomplish; when sun and moon join, nowhere is not illumined.'

The ancient alchemical classics don't contain a single meaningless word, but whether or not they are skillfully utilized is up to the individual.

If practitioners of alchemy can purify their minds, minimize desires, moderate consumption, and regulate activities, their work will progress

naturally.

During quiet sitting, the eyes may be half closed or completely closed.

What is essential is to keep the attention on the elixir field. The ‘spirit’ is fire, while the elixir field is water. Applying the ‘fire’ of awareness to the ‘water’ of the elixir field transmutes energy.

One should seek to set the ‘waterwheel’ in motion, but it will turn when the time comes—‘If you try to hasten, you won’t get there.’

The period of quiet sitting may be long or short; if you can really become empty and quiet, so that your mind is steady and thoughts stop, then ten minutes’ sitting will be effective, and half an hour’s sitting will also be effective. If you are unsettled and restless, and your thoughts do not stop, then even if you sit on your cushion all day long what benefit will it have?

If you go into the mountains to concentrate solely on cultivation without working at a job, the effect of the practice will surely be quicker, but there’s nothing wrong with working a job on the one hand while cultivating purity on the other, except that in the latter case the result will be seen a little bit later, that’s all.

If you practice wholeheartedly with a mind ever undivided, then a spiritual immortal will come be your teacher, moved by your sincerity. It is easy for a teacher to find a student, hard for a student to find a teacher. In the past I sought an enlightened teacher on the continent, lighting incense and praying silently every day. I did this for six years at a stretch, and in the end was given transmission. Seen in this light, seeking a teacher is very difficult, but if you seek sincerely you will find one—so isn't that simple?

A teacher points out your errors to you, based on your own faculties and potential, so that you can understand at once and live a happy life. How can one not seek such a teacher sincerely?

The *Classic of the Central Court* says, "It's not that Immortalists and Taoists have spirit; they develop realization by storing vitality and building up energy." So it can be seen that Immortalism and realization are accomplished by gradual buildup.

"Die while alive—this is the Way. When sages live in the ordinary world, then they are immortals." As long as the human mentality does not die, the mind of the Way does not come to life. If the mind of the Way comes to

life, you go on to acquire spiritual capacities. Body and mind both refined, you can appear however you want; though you live in the mundane world, your name is on the register of immortals.

It's not very important whether one's hair is black or white. People who cultivate realization keep the appearance they had at the time they attained the Way. That is why among the ancient immortals and realized people there were those who had hoary heads and also those who had youthful locks.

“A hundred years like a day, myriad miles right before the eyes.”

“Everyone can drink the wine of long life; everyone can become an undying immortal.” These are not illusions, they are actual effects of cultivation.

When the ‘yang spirit’ first emerges, there are very many dangers. It is best to be cautious and attentive, to prevent accidents. However, if one has already cultivated essence sufficiently so that one is inwardly stable and does not pursue external things, then ‘even if dangerous, there is nothing wrong.’

When the ‘yin spirit’ is projected by effort, it is still ghostly and not very efficient. It is necessary to refine it further until the yin negativity is gone and the yang positivity is pure, when it becomes possible to fly and transform, shedding the physical shell and becoming immortal.

When first learning quiet sitting, it will not do to give up either inner or outer exercise. Outer exercise refers to methods like T’ai-chi-ch’uan, Eight Step Brocade, and so on. However, when inner exercise progresses, then outer exercise can be stopped to work solely on quiet sitting day and night.

Wang Hsien-ch'ing

Originally from Chiangsu, Wang Hsien-ch'ing moved to Shanghai, where he completed a degree in law at the age of 66. When complications of an old war wound required amputation of a leg at the age of 63, he recovered from the operation in a little over a month, without the use of medicine for pain.

Four Essentials for Cultivating the Way

It is essential to moderate consumption. Those who practice sitting should not eat too much; the evening meal in particular should be small. Also, it is not good to drink too much tea at night.

It is essential to be careful to avoid cold. 'Immortals only fear wind in back of the head.' The back should always be warm; early in the morning and late at night one should dress more warmly to avoid catching cold.

It is essential to control anger. One firebrand of ignorance can burn up all your accomplishment, so be careful!

It is essential to be sparing with vital spirit. Too much looking, too much listening—these cannot fail to deplete the spirit. Therefore Taoists ‘withdraw the gaze and listen within,’ placing importance on ‘gathering in.’ If you can actually accomplish ‘gathering in,’ there will be no wasteful scattering.

Eyes slightly open gazing steadily at the tip of the nose while the real attention is on the lower elixir field—this is the most basic exercise of watching an opening in quiet sitting. One should not, however, keep the attention fixated rigidly; so-called ‘being aware without keeping watch,’ ‘watching without guarding’ is considered the best way. It is like keeping watch over a room; you just have to pay attention, you don’t need to fixate on this table or that chair.

‘The arising of thoughts is sickness; not continuing is medicine.’ ‘Don’t fear the occurrence of thoughts, just fear being slow to notice.’ There is a difference between transient thoughts and obsessive thoughts. Thoughts that continue uninterrupted are obsessive thoughts, or some call them thoughts that stick in the mind. Thoughts that come and go are called transient thoughts, or some call them unconscious thoughts. The harm in obsessive thoughts is great, the harm in transient thoughts is trivial. When

thoughts arise, clear them away immediately; if they arise again, clear them away again. When you've done this for a long time and are deeply accomplished at it, then you won't be able to excite thoughts even if you want to.

When practicing quiet sitting, let go of everything and leave it to nature; don't press for results. The *Tao Te Ching* says, "The Way is patterned on Nature." Nature is the supreme model for those who cultivate the Way; no matter what the method of practice, or what the level, no one may violate this basic rule.

When attention is steady, the spirit is still. The spirit is fire. When genuine attention rests gently in the 'elixir field,' eventually the abdomen will become warm, and there will be a flow of heat.

Keeping the attention on locations in the head easily produces illness. If you keep attention fixated obsessively on these locations, you can even go blind. Focusing the attention on the 'lower elixir field' is safest.

The books of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are Chinese classics, and they are also world classics. Practitioners of Taoism ought to study them carefully

and understand them experientially.

What are essence and life? Essence is spiritual consciousness, which should be used to penetrate human life and thoroughly understand it. Life is spiritual energy—‘energy is the stem of life, life is in energy’—so energy and life have an intimate relationship. Essence should be cultivated to completeness, energy should be nurtured to repletion. This, in my opinion, is the meaning of dual cultivation.

After the ‘water wheel’ has gone into action, just let it be natural. If you force it to rise, then you’ll eventually ‘burn out.’ Be careful!

When the ‘yang spirit’ emerges, ‘vitality, energy, and spirit’ are gathered in the head. This is called ‘the three flowers gathered at the peak.’

When first learning quiet sitting, it is necessary to ‘focus on an opening’ in order to realize results, but don’t fixate obsessively, and don’t get your hopes up, otherwise it will be hard to make progress.

Our essence is originally an open awareness; if we accept nature, we return to the root. Return to the root, and you exist forever.

Those who practice the Way should be brave and undaunted. Therefore it is said, “If you have a method but no will, that nullifies the method. If you have will but no method, this is a genuine foundation.”

Those who nurture life should be content with simplicity and clear in their determination. Govern the material by means of the spirit, don't let the material enslave the spirit.

Keeping the body within its sphere, let the mind roam outside of things.

Put life and death out of your mind. An ancient sage said of this, ‘Put yourself out, and you will survive; put yourself last and you will be first.’

Our mind is the mind of heaven. Heaven is empty and clear; when the mind is utterly empty, it is spiritual, and merges in this quality with Heaven.

An ancient sage said, “The Way values personal application.”

‘Mental fasting’ means the mind is empty, undivided, and not mixed up.

When totally void, fasting mentally and sitting forgetting, then Heaven and humanity merge.

‘Though the person is busy, the mind is not busy’—this is the essential rule for refining the mind in the midst of worldly pollutants.

Obliterate the conscious spirit to experience undifferentiated wholeness, simply being natural, and the subtle function of the original spirit will be uncanny.

The posture for practicing inner t'ai-chi-ch'uan requires the coccyx to be centered and upright, the energy sunk into the elixir field (lower abdomen), and the strength concentrated in the legs. Solid below, empty above—this is how it's done.

When you exercise you close your mouth and don't speak, using your nose to breathe, your state of mind empty and relaxed. The same goes for quiet sitting.

At all times, wherever they may be, practitioners of the Way have no thought or worry, are clear and calm, empty and unconcerned, the spirit

shining on the lower field, returning to the root with each breath—this is daily practice. The spirit shining on the lower field should be on the border of being and nonbeing, neither forgetting nor fostering; if you obsessively focus fixedly, you will make yourself sick.

An ancient philosopher said, “Refine your nature in the midst of society, nurture your energy in the mountains and woods.”

To be at ease whatever happens is characteristic of people of the Way.

When a single thought is correct, a hundred falsehoods retreat.

When real positive energy sprouts into motion, the constitution is sturdy and the body is light.

Ancient sages have said, “Whether walking, standing still, sitting, or lying down, one does not depart from this.” “The Way cannot be left for a moment.” Please examine this carefully.

Essential rules for quiet sitting: 1) Make the body straight. When the whole body is relaxed, eventually it straightens itself. 2) Empty the mind.

Make it empty but not vacant, not vacant yet empty. 3) Solidify the attention. ‘Thoughts should not be aroused, attention should not be scattered. If thoughts arise, the fire overheats; if attention scatters, the fire goes cold.’

Loosen the clothing and belt, let body and mind be light and relaxed, and energy will naturally return to balance and harmony, gathering in the lower abdomen. This is called ‘tuning the breath.’

During quiet sitting, the eyes should keep the light of spirit within, only allowing a single ray of light out, focusing on the nose and one or two feet in front of the body. The essential point is in solidifying the spirit and gathering in the energy. The eyes may open or close; in either case, just be natural—no need to be concerned about it. When you have achieved a profound state in your practice, then your eyes will naturally be like hanging blinds and won’t become tightly shut.

When quiet sitting reaches the point where the spirit is clear and energy is full, then your mind will be clear and lucid more often than not. Without expecting it, you reach the point where ‘the spirit is full so you don’t feel like sleeping.’

During quiet sitting, breathing should best be allowed to be natural, but to afford beginners something on which to focus, keeping the mind on the breath is also one method. When you've practiced this for a long time, you 'solidify the spirit in emptiness, collect the energy in infinity.' This naturally progresses to a marvelous state of mystical union with the universe.

Regarding posture for sitting, during quiet sitting the head should be upright and the neck should be straight, not leaning forwards or backwards. The shoulders should be level, the back should be straight. Don't let wind hit your back, and don't lean against the wall or rest on something cold and wet. In sum, the shoulders and back should be warm. The chest should expand without distention, the abdomen should be straight without being pulled up, the breathing should be relaxed and sink down into the lower abdomen. The waist should not be too straight or too curved. Single coil or double coil will both do. If there is discomfort or numbness, then it is all right to relax the legs and switch them. If you sit on a chair, place your hands palms down on your knees; and here too comfort and naturalness are appropriate. If you sit on a cushion, a thick soft cushion is best.

Passive and active energy channels: an important purpose of cultivating energy and refining the body is in causing circulation in the passive and active energy channels. The active channel is the ocean of the yang vessels, while the passive channel is the ocean of the yin vessels. If you want to seek extension of life, you have to restore the circulation in these primal energy channels. This is done by congealing spirit and energy together.

Gentle firing is simple natural breathing. Fierce firing is breathing with unremitting attention returning to the root with each breath.

‘True living midnight’ is when mind and body are at ease during quiet sitting, the whole being is soothed and relaxed; empty and silent, totally at one, you don’t know there are sky and earth, others and self—you only sense a tremendous stability of body and mind, and warmth like spring. This is the arising of positive energy; this is called the true living midnight. When you experience this state, just be natural—don’t be delighted, lest the state disappear and your work regress.

Among the elementary exercises of quiet sitting, focusing on an opening is one important method. The openings often seen in alchemical literature are as follows:

1. Nirvana—top of the head.
2. The Bright Hall—between the eyebrows.
3. The Mountain Base—between the eyes.
4. The Gauge—tip of the nose.
5. Tongue-tip—the tongue is lightly placed where the teeth meet the upper palate, and the attention is kept there.
6. The Central Court—three or four feet from the physical body, directly opposite the navel. When the attention is lightly focused there, this is called focus of the attention on the central court.
7. The Upper Elixir Field—at the intersection of an even line going in from between the brows and a straight line down from the crown of the head. This is also called the nirvana chamber.
8. The Middle Elixir Field—below the heart, above the navel.
9. The Lower Elixir Field—the ocean of energy, or the lower abdomen below the navel.
10. The Welling Spring—center of the front pad of the foot.

It is impossible to generalize about which of these openings are right or wrong. Throughout history different practitioners have focused on different openings. If you can be light, relaxed, and natural, focusing without

fixation, then whatever opening you focus on can produce results without negative side effects.

The quiet sitting method for women is to focus on the depression between the breasts while sitting, but attentive without being intent, not becoming fixated obsessively. When thoughts stop and the mind tuned, you return to empty silence. Lightly massage the breasts, furthermore, to promote circulate and make the energy gentle; you will naturally arrive at a wonderful state.

Focusing on the opening of the ‘lower elixir field’ is the royal road.

When energy is full in the elixir field, it will naturally rush down through the perineum, then ascend backward up the coccyx and through the spine, thus clearing the ‘active channel.’

If you can ‘neither forget nor foster, focusing without fixation,’ then even if it is hard to make progress you will not easily regress.

‘Real human beings breathe from their heels.’ When accomplishment in practice is deep, you return to the root with every breath, echoing naturally

from heels to head.

A number of small defeats build up into a small step forward; a number of small steps forward build up into a big step forward. The road is rough and you may stumble, but if you can be diligent, constant, and resolute, you will certainly be able to reach fulfillment. All undertakings are like this, not just practice of the Way!

‘External bandits are easy to inhibit; mental bandits are hard to eliminate.’ People who practice the Way should check this time and again.

The Real Human Shih Hsing-lin said, “You see the pill form in concentration.” There is a difference, however, between ‘dead concentration’ and ‘living concentration.’ Taoist concentration is ‘living concentration.’ In concentration, we ‘push over mountains and upset oceans’ within the body—the power is incomparably great.

‘Concentration’ means keeping the vital spirit gathered within; after emerging from concentration, not only does it have no effect on health—work on the Way progresses by leaps and bounds, while the limbs and body cannot get numb. However, when in concentration it is imperative to have

faithful, reliable people to afford attentive protection from wind, rain, upset, disturbance, and other unexpected happenings; then one will be safe.

When the eye openings seem closed and the ear openings seem blocked during sitting, these are phenomena that are bound to occur before entering concentration.

‘When energy is full, you don’t think of eating.’ This is a natural result of the practice; it does not mean the same thing as ‘avoiding grain’ or ‘fasting.’ ‘Avoiding grain’ refers to abstention from cooked food, just eating substitutes like fresh fruits and dried dates.

Appearances are illusory; practitioners should not be quick to believe illusions are realities. Chuang-tzu said, “The Way can be attained, but not seen.” When you sense ‘being’ within ‘nonbeing,’ only then can it be called ‘true being.’ Although there is no such thing as true being in the body, there is actually an experience, by which one can transform oneself. Once attained, it is realized forever.

The brain is like waves of electricity; it is hard to avoid illusory sensations. If you let yourself be affected by illusory sensations, you will get so used to

them that your nervous system will become disordered and your life will be shortened. So it's good to forget both 'being' and 'nonbeing' and practice being unaffected; as the saying goes, 'When you see the strange as not strange, its strangeness disappears.'

Taoists cultivate both essence and life, ingesting energy rather than subduing energy. Buddhists place emphasis only on essence, subduing energy rather than ingesting energy. For this reason, even when Taoists enter profound concentration, true breath still continues, while inner experiences evolve, beyond comparison with anything.

Ch'en Tun-fu

Ch'en Tun-fu was from Sichuan. Born into comfortable circumstances, he devoted himself to study of Taoism. He became a firm devotee of the Wu-Yang school of Taoism after having successfully cured himself of a serious illness using its methods.

The novel *Journey to the West* seems to have been derived from *Collection of Transmissions of the Way from Chung to Lu*. The Immortalist School of Wu and Yang seems to have been derived in turn from *Journey to the West*.

The first step of the work, building the foundation, is spoken of in brief by Buddhists, in detail by Taoists. The final exercise, returning to emptiness, is spoken of in detail by Buddhists, in brief by Taoists. Leaving the world or entering the world, the paths are not the same.

When people are in the womb, essence and life are originally united; after birth, spirit and energy separate, essence and life differ; this gets worse day by day, year by year, until no breath remains. The method of cultivation differs in the various sects, but in terms of keeping sincere, undivided pure attention present to get spirit and energy to merge and essence and life to

combine, thus to return to the origin, the three teachings of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are the same.

There's a saying that covers it all—'The path of immortality is simple and easy—it's no more than energy and spirit, that's all.'

Wang Chung-yang was a personal disciple of Chung-li Ch'uan, Master of True Yang. His alchemical methods all appear in the book *Collection of Transmissions of the Way from Chung to Lu*. Those who cultivate realization should carefully read this book, as well as The Immortalist School of Wu and Yang. Give it ten years' time, investigating more the more you doubt, understanding more the more you investigate, and eventually one day you will penetrate everything.

'Spiritual immortals conceal the easy, not the difficult.' The difficult parts of alchemical classics should of course be studied thoroughly; the easy parts, even more, should not be taken lightly!

My countryman Ch'en Tzu-jan was a Taoist priest. All his life he just kept his attention in the nirvana center; he wore a single garment winter and

summer, his spirit was clear and his body was sound. Everyone who saw him thought him extraordinary.

Recently a Taoist sect has come into being that seems similar to the genuine tradition of the ‘gold pill,’ but its source is not pure—even though they have some very elderly members, they are decrepit in their old age, far from the ideal of ‘restoring old age to youth.’

In olden times, Ancestor Lu studied the Way from Chung-li Ch’uan, Master of True Yang. Ancestor Lu said, “I followed the master as a disciple for seven or eight years; the flesh was worn off my shoulders, my feet were covered with sores, and yet I still hadn’t heard a single word from the teacher.” Still Ancestor Lu was not resentful, and didn’t slacken, so eventually he obtained authentic transmission. Generally speaking, if you don’t go through grinding and polishing, it is hard to get rid of old habits. So a disciple should think deep and long about where a teacher’s real intention is in testing.

During quiet sitting, various kinds of hallucinations may occur. If you can see as if you didn’t see, hear as if you didn’t hear, then truth remains while illusions vanish.

In recent years many Taoist books have been published in Taiwan, but many of them are not worth reading.

Those who are calm are often quiet; those who are clear and quiet are often long-lived.

‘Energy’ needs ‘spirit’ for control, ‘spirit’ needs ‘energy’ to avoid nihilism.

‘When spirit and breath rest on each other, there is an esoteric communication.’ All methods of inducing spirit and breath to merge can be called ‘life exercises.’

When stillness reaches a limit, there must be movement; this is a natural principle.

Cultivate essence exercises diligently and study alchemical classics thoroughly, first making adequate preparation. If you actually seek the Way wholeheartedly, becoming ever firmer as time passes, eventually you should move a real immortal to give you personal instruction.

First cultivate essence, then cultivate life. If the foundation of work on essence is good, then the work on life will be an immediate success.

As for the aspect of work on essence, if you can refine your mind twenty-four hours a day to the point where not a single thought arises, then you have gone from the temporal into the realm of the primal. Next comes the aspect of work on life; once the mind is empty and ethereal, what is culled is now true positive energy, and what is crystallized now is the true elixir. Otherwise, if the source is not pure, what is culled will not be true positive energy, and what is crystallized will be nothing more than illusory elixir.

To refine vitality into energy requires the use of wind and fire. Wind is breath, fire is spirit. When spirit enters into breath, working the bellows, then vitality spontaneously transmutes into energy.

My countryman Li Ch'ing-yun may have lived to be two hundred and fifty-seven years old, but his intelligence was very low, and his attainment was limited. Therefore he left the world forever before having realized the Way.

In the caves of certain mountains there are many Taoist practitioners who are over two and three hundred years old. This is nothing to wonder at.

Breathing exercises, Eight Step Brocade, and T'ai-chi-ch'uan are all a type of life exercise. If you only want physical fitness, then choose one to practice, and eventually it will show results.

Many modern alchemical books only teach people to gaze at the bridge of the nose, keep the attention in the elixir field, swallow saliva, take in air, and exercise temporal vitality and energy, that's all. These minor techniques are easy to hear about but difficult to accomplish.

Wang Ts'an-wu

Wang Ts'an-wu was skilled in martial arts, poetry, and calligraphy. A longtime devotee of quiet sitting, he is said to have gone into trance for a week or more at a time, even as long as forty-five days on one occasion. Although he used a standard Taoist format of concentration points, his method of procedure was unusual.

There are six apertures on the back of the body of a human being, and six apertures on the front of the body, twelve in all, back and front. Among these twelve, the perineum is the main aperture. This is what is called the 'opening of openings.' The other eleven are just assistant apertures. The perineum, also called 'the ocean floor,' is between the genitals and the rectum. During quiet sitting, the whole spirit should be concentrated on this aperture—breathe out here, breathe in here. Before the waterwheel has been set in motion, it will not do to let up for even a little while. This is what is referred to in the *Classic of Centered Balance*: 'The Way cannot be left for a moment. What can be left is not the Way.' It is also referred to as 'not leaving this whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down,' where this refers to the perineum.

The perineum is the ruler of the eight channels; once the perineum is cleared, the eight channels are all cleared. Therefore keeping the attention on the perineum can be used to penetrate the passes, to open the apertures, to enter profound concentration, to open the door of heaven, and to acquire psychic powers—its subtle functions cannot all be fully expressed in words. The ‘aperture’ is the ‘furnace,’ while the refinement of the elixir is like an atomic reaction in a nuclear power generator. If you keep your attention here skillfully, then it is profound without mystification, subtle without obscurity, empty but not void, not void yet empty.

Sit straight and fold the hands, placing them lightly near the ‘lower elixir field.’ The way to fold the hands is with the right thumb in the grip of the left hand.

Breathing should be completely normal—don’t use effort or force at all. When you breathe in, the abdomen expands; when you breathe out, it contracts. If you can also sink the energy down into the ‘ocean floor,’ causing vitality, energy, and spirit all to congeal together here, then you will experience no end of sublime states.

Lightly massage the twelve apertures. The six apertures in the back are the active channel; they are yang, and are for promoting yang fire. The six apertures on the front of the body are the passive channel; they are yin, and are for withdrawing the yin convergence. Using the method of ‘thumbs fingering the back,’ lightly massage the back six apertures, from the first one in the coccyx up to the sixth at the back of the head, rubbing each one thirty-six times. In addition, the one at the very top, called the gate at the crown, or the door of heaven, or nirvana, should also be lightly massaged—it doesn’t matter how many times. Then lightly massage the six front apertures, starting from the first one, the ‘mountain base’ between the eyes down to the sixth at the perineum, rubbing each one twenty-four times. If you first do this preliminary external exercise of massage, then later when you induce ‘pure attention’ to pass through these twelve apertures the effect will be most evident. When you come to the sixth front aperture, at the perineum, lift up the scrotum with the left hand and lightly rub the perineum twenty-four times with the right hand; when you have some feeling, this is the opening of the aperture. After that it is comparatively easy to make progress in the practice.

Using attention rather than effort is called ‘gentle firing,’ while using both attention and effort is called ‘fierce firing.’ Focusing the spirit on ‘the

ocean floor' enough to make it swell is fierce firing; the subtle breathing used to get attention to lead up to the coccyx, the first point in the active channel up the spine, is gentle firing. When applying the gentle firing, silently count thirty-six breaths. What is a breath? One exhalation and one inhalation constitute one breath; when you count breaths, you may count either exhalations or inhalations. Do this at every stage, but when you get to the fourth stage, which is at the fifth vertebrae from the top, or where you can reach back to your spine with your hand, after silently counting thirty-six breaths you should hold your breath for a second to a minute—this is called 'bathing.' Then lead on up to the 'door of heaven' at the top of the head, resting for one minute after it swells. Then go on to bring the attention down to the first point on the passive channel in the front of the body, the 'mountain base' between the eyes, concentrating the spirit until it begins to swell; then count twenty-four breaths, breathing extremely subtly and totally naturally. Do the same at each stage down the passive channel, but when you get to the fourth stage, which is under the hollow of the chest, do the same as at the fourth stage in the back; after silently counting twenty-four breaths, again hold your breath for one second to one minute. Now this 'one second to one minute' simply refers to a space of time—in reality, the longer you hold your breath the better, though beginners should proceed gradually and not try to force quick achievement.

The period from eleven o'clock at night until one in the morning is called 'living midnight.' Quiet sitting at this time is most effective; next best is the period from eleven in the morning until one in the afternoon. Next in order of preference are the hours from five to seven in the morning, and five to seven in the evening.

When practice is successful, there is no sound, no smell; it is as is naturally. What need is there to go deeply into the problem of the firing process?

Temporal breathing is fierce firing, primal womb breathing is gentle firing. When you tune the breath to the point where it is extremely slow and extremely fine, like going back to the womb and reverting to primal womb breathing, then 'reversal of aging and restoration of youth' is inevitable.

Spirit is essence, energy is life; when essence and life merge, yin and yang join; this is called 'paired cultivation of essence and life.'

Buddhism and Taoism are one; Ch'an and Taoism are not at odds. Those who practice the Way should not maintain sectarian views.

Bodhidharma Boxing is a kind of soft exercise; the more slowly it is executed, the better. It is similar in nature to T'ai-chi-ch'uan or Absolute Boxing, in the sense that both are soft arts that combine vitality, energy, and spirit.

In the past, when my practice had deepened, I once abstained from grain for two years. Abstention from grain should be done in a completely natural way, not forced. I first gave up breakfast, then lunch as well, taking only a little supper. I then began to reduce the amount of rice I ate at supper, until finally I wasn't eating any grain at all, substituting fruits and the like. Still my vital spirit was like a tiger, and I could do my job and go mountain climbing as usual.

Pine seeds and cedar seeds are also wonderful for abstention from grain. One of my senior colleagues always eats these when he goes into the mountains for pure practice.

In sleeping practice, place the palm of the left hand over the orifice of the left ear, lightly resting the thumb of the right hand in the depression of the collar bone, lying on the left side. The lower leg should be slightly bent,

the upper leg slightly extended. The opposite way, lying on the right side, is also done this way. Now when sleeping practice progresses, one should keep attention on the ‘ocean floor’ opening. At first, tune the breathing; eventually, when vitality, energy, and spirit are completely focused on this spot, each exhalation and each inhalation is here on the ‘ocean floor.’

When sleeping practice progresses, occasionally the elixir field will convulse at odd times. This is an inevitable process in sleeping practice, nothing to wonder at; if you can continue uninterrupted in profound silence, with a single point of subtle awareness, then you won’t fall fast asleep, and yet it won’t damage your health.

When you are beginning to learn sleeping practice, it is easy to fall asleep—let it be, and don’t worry about it, just resume practicing when you wake up. Eventually the habit will become natural, and you won’t get groggy even if you fall fast asleep.

When you do this practice, you must close the windows, otherwise it is easy to catch cold. Eliminate bodily wastes before doing the practice. Also, don’t have sexual intercourse until about seven days after the practice period.

Although there are many practical methods, still you must awaken yourself.

‘Dismissing desire’ is certainly difficult; ‘quiet stabilization’ is not at all easy.

When the fetus is in the womb, essence and life are unified; it is after birth that essence and life first separate. Paired cultivation of essence and life means returning to the state of unification of essence and life as when in the womb. Talk of cultivating essence without cultivating life, or of cultivating life without cultivating essence, are both biased views.

Students of the sword focus on the ‘lower elixir field.’

Orthodox Ch’an also focuses on the ‘ocean floor.’ If you can do this consistently, you experience a variety of subtle states.

The ‘ocean floor’ is the dragon palace; some people also call it the ‘mysterious pass.’

Cultivation of the Way first requires firm faith, then undivided devotion.

Use wind to fan fire, and this naturally transmutes vitality. Wind means extremely gentle, extremely subtle natural breathing. Fire means spirit. Set the spirit on the ‘ocean floor’ and silently count thirty-six breaths, and wind and fire will both be there. If you practice this way, involuntary emission of semen should stop.

When you ‘let go of myriad objects,’ then not a single thought arises; what is most essential in cultivation of the way is simply ‘quiet.’

How does one practice so that there will be warmth in the elixir field? First it is essential to tune the breathing, tuning without being conscious of tuning; when the breath goes from extreme slowness and extreme fineness to reach the point of nonexistence, that is getting close. Second, quiet concentration is necessary. Third, single-mindedness is required. Fourth, it is necessary to freeze the spirit on the ‘ocean floor.’ If you do this for a long, long time, eventually warmth will naturally occur in the ‘elixir field.’

When you sweat profusely during quiet sitting, this is a sign of some circulation of energy and blood, not a symptom of illness, so don’t be alarmed.

It is possible to enter great concentration by the practice of focusing on the ‘ocean floor.’

When there is warmth in the coccyx, this is a good sign. When accomplishment in practice is profound, the whole body becomes warm

‘Ten months’ gestation’ refers to the fulfillment of the firing process; it is not necessarily limited to ten months. It may take as long as ten or twenty years.

Practicing the Way depends on whether or not you are single-minded, not on how old you are. If you are single-minded you will progress, if you are not single-minded you will not progress—this is a natural principle.

Practicing the Way is a matter of building up vitality and accumulating energy, in an orderly and gradual manner.

For women to cultivate refinement, first focus attention on the diaphragm, then on the perineum; after stopping menstruation, the method of practice is the same as for men.

When carrying out sleeping practice, the vital spirit should be focused entirely on the perineum. After practicing this for a long time, it will not be easy to fall into oblivion; you will always stay in a subtle state that seems like sleep but is not sleep!

When accomplishment in practice is deep the body is naturally light. References to ‘riding the wind’ and ‘floating, on the brink of immortality’ are not empty words.

Li Tse-min

Li Tse-min was taught by an old man who came to visit him one day while he was in the hospital recovering from an injury. He reminded Li of a dream he had had as a child, in which he was playing chess with an old man, suggesting that he himself was none other. He told Li that he had over three hundred disciples, but only Li could be entrusted with his method of 'opening the apertures.' According to Li Tse-min's report, the old man was already three hundred and seventy-seven years old when they met.

Eight stages of practice:

1. Open the energy aperture, clear the internal organs, correct the breathing.
2. Open the kidney aperture, generate vitality, stabilize the basis.
3. Open the ocean floor aperture, cause the energy in the elixir field to pass through the kidneys, down to the ocean floor, then back to the elixir field.

Now there is continuous circulation through three passes of the lower base.

(The foregoing three stages are all for establishing life in the lower base; this is the work of refining vitality into energy, called building the foundation. The purpose is to restore positive energy and reestablish the basis.)

4. Open the central channel, draw energy up it, then let it descend along the spine and then return to the elixir field. This is called 'extracting from

water to fill in fire.’

5. Open the passive channel, clear the internal organs, and cause their energies to harmonize.

6. Open the active channel, and connect the passive and active channels.

Make the active channel conduct upwards and the passive channel downwards, extending laterally to the eight extra channels.

(These three stages are all part of internal work within the body, constituting the central pass, the work of refining energy into spirit.)

7. Breathe in the vitality of the sun. Every morning at dawn, before the sun has risen, face East and take in the vitality of the sun.

8. Breathe in the essence of the moon. Every month at full moon, including the night before and the night after the moon is exactly full, take in the vitality of yin.

(These last two stages are outside-the-body work, causing the ethereal positive energy in one’s body to merge with the ethereal positive energy of heaven and earth.)

When attention is kept in the elixir field, spirit enters into energy.

Eventually the elixir field warms; in alchemical classics this is called the arising of positive energy. Gradually the whole body warms, and the face

glows. If you just want to repel illness and strengthen the body, this one step is enough.

Li Chin-feng

Li Chin-feng is said to have mastered Taoism. He wore the same clothes through all seasons, and was reputed to have turned his grey hair back to black, and regrown his fallen teeth; he was also expert in snake medicines and herbal elixirs.

I have found three modes of health care to be effective: 1) Alchemy; 2) Breathing Exercises; 3) Quiet Sitting.

Alchemy can be divided into the two general categories of internal alchemy and external alchemy.

In external alchemy, pills are made by long slow cooking of medicinal herbs and substances such as asparagus root, white atractylodes, fleecflower root, and pine sap. This is also called herbal alchemy, but there is no real teacher's transmission.

A long time ago, in a certain mountain cave in Guangxi province, I found a manuscript-bundle of ancient bamboo strips, over a thousand years old, inscribed entirely in archaic characters. After consulting with a specialist in writing, I managed to recognize about two thirds of the characters, but had

no way to decipher the other third. Now the external alchemical pills that I cook up are based on this text.

As for the part of the text dealing with internal alchemy, I studied it for a long time without understanding it. Then I received some suggestions from a certain practitioner, and found that what it said in the ancient text unexpectedly agreed with the transmission that practitioner had received from his teacher. Thus I was able to penetrate what I hadn't understood after long study.

Breathing exercises are done in two ways:

One is to stand up straight with the feet apart, lift up both hands while breathing through the nose, slowly taking it into the lower elixir field. Halt for a moment, then breathe out slowly through the mouth. Do this twelve times in a row, and then stop.

The other way is to gaze at the colored morning sun at dawn, open your arms wide, and breathe naturally for about fifteen minutes. Then breathe in through the nose into the elixir field and exhale slowly through the mouth, lowering your arms and crossing your hands over your lower abdomen.

Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth like this twenty-four times.

In quiet sitting, first focus on the forehead for a while, then shift the focus to the lower field. When both others and self are forgotten, you are peaceful and at ease; then you will have indescribable subtle states.

Wu Ts'eng-lin

Wu Ts'eng-lin was a university professor of physical education.

My quiet sitting begins with breathing exercise. Breathing exercise means deep breathing. This so-called deep breathing is not, however, deep breathing in the lungs as understood in modern times; it is deep breathing in the elixir field according to ancient tradition. The method is to first breathe in slowly through the nose into the elixir field, then exhale slowly through the nose. Practice at a regular time, without interruption. After saliva is produced in the mouth, then switch to the method of ingesting energy. Ingesting energy means to gulp the air you breathe into the elixir field. This must be done in a relaxed and natural manner, or else you will get dizzy, and it will not be easy to produce saliva.

Ingest energy until the elixir field becomes warm, then begin quiet sitting. Do this twice a day, morning and night, preferably at a set time, keeping it up consistently. It doesn't matter how long you sit, but perseverance is best.

In quiet sitting, if you focus on an aperture your progress will be slow, while if you don't focus on an aperture your progress will be fast. But if

you don't focus on an opening, you still have to keep a subtle awareness present; otherwise you will fall into 'insensible vacuity.'

'The spirit guarding the elixir field' merely indicates the region below the navel; it doesn't mean keeping focused on a specific point at such-a-such an exact location. If you keep fixated on a certain point, you'll become obsessed and make yourself sick.

Where pure attention subtly stays, there you see an aperture. First you focus on an artificial aperture; eventually, as practice deepens, the real opening will naturally appear.

During quiet sitting, breathing should be allowed to be natural. If it is too tense, then consciously relax it.

What are ecstasy and abstraction? Ecstasy is when feeling has not yet disappeared and spirit and energy are still there, remaining spontaneously focused on a single point. In abstraction, feeling has disappeared completely, and even this single point is not there. But there is an ethereal awareness within—it is not like a dead tree or cold ashes.

When your body is relaxed and your head is clear, that is sufficient evidence that the practice you are doing is appropriate to your constitution.

The practice of non-doing is very hard at first, but once you've entered the gate your progress is comparatively rapid.

When practice reaches the point where you can hardly talk about it even if you want to, then your thoughts will stop spontaneously without your halting them.

If you must focus on an aperture, then focus on the whole area above the navel and below the heart, the so-called 'middle elixir field.' Compared to the variously defined 'lower elixir field,' this seems to produce effects more easily and have fewer untoward side effects.

Yang Ch'ing-li

Yang Ch'ing-li is said to have met many adepts, and himself was author of a popular book called Shortcut to Great Attainment.

Breathing exercises

What Taoists call the 'hundred days constructing the foundation' is in reality a kind of breathing exercise.

First sit normally with your back straight. Your hands should be on your knees at first, then place on the elixir field. When inhaling, inhale slowly through the nose, using attention to send it to the elixir field; then stop a moment to store the energy. When exhaling, exhale through the nose, using attention to lead it to 'welling spring' opening in the center of the soles of the feet.

Breathing in or out, it is not good to hear its sound; the longer each exhalation and each inhalation is, the better it is.

First inhale to the upper abdomen, then press it down into the lower abdomen. Eventually the lower abdomen will be able to pump like a

bellows on its own; then the breathing sinks entirely into the lower abdomen.

This kind of external breathing is called active breathing. When ordinary respiration stops and the lower abdomen automatically expels and intakes, as if it were breathing in place of the mouth and nose, eventually it gradually becomes refined into ‘womb breathing.’ This kind of internal breathing is called still breathing.

The foregoing is the method of breathing exercise according to the tradition of the Green City Sect.

Breathing exercise doesn’t have much effect for the first six months; after eighteen months, then you can store energy.

If you haven’t done breathing exercise before quiet sitting, that is like instability in a foundation. The reason why eminent monks since ancient times have been excellent at quieting practices but ultimately didn’t attain prolonged life is because Buddhists don’t do this kind of foundation work. Taoists who don’t first build the foundation this way but immediately set about advanced work also wind up the same way!

The girdling channel is the diaphragm. When you inhale, you should use attention to guide the energy into the lower abdomen, while at the same time firmly believing you can open the girdling channel that way. Eventually the girdling channel will naturally open. The same is true of opening the other channels.

First open the passive channel, then open the active channel.

When you have done breathing exercise long enough, eventually you can control it by yourself. If you only sit quietly, then it's not easy to get energy into the right track.

When spirit and energy merge into one, you naturally enter stable concentration.

Energy Induction

Energy induction is also divided into practice in movement and practice in stillness. T'ai-chi-ch'uan and Eight Step Brocade are energy induction in

movement; the circulation of energy through the passive and active channels is energy induction in stillness.

Quietly rolling the eyes left and right is called ‘shifting the handle of the Dipper.’

Clenching the teeth thirty-six times: first look down at your crotch, clenching your teeth; then look up toward the crown of your head, relaxing. Clenching once and relaxing once like this constitute one clenching. This is the ‘secret.’

The method of ‘sounding the drum of heaven’ (covering the ears with the palms and snapping the fingers against the back of the head)—when ‘sounding the drum of heaven,’ the palms should be clamped tightly over the ears to avoid letting energy leak. Otherwise, there is no effect. This too is a ‘secret.’

Repeatedly shrugging the shoulders: place the hands on the hips and raise your shoulders; this is called repeatedly shrugging the shoulders. This too is a ‘secret.’

Massaging the base of the ears, the sides of the ears, the thyroid gland, and such locations can stimulate the production of hormones. The modern Japanese call this the diencephalon or interbrain. The stimulation caused by emergencies is in reality no more than this.

Enlightened teachers conceal the ‘secrets’ but do not conceal the ‘methods.’ The ‘secrets’ are not transmitted if the person is unsuitable, and the ‘methods’ do not work without the ‘secrets.’

There are different states of the warming of the elixir field: First, when attention reaches, it warms partly. Second, when energy reaches, the heat concentrates into a focal point. Third, when spirit reaches, all three reach, and energy and spirit merge into one.

There is a definite order to the opening of the eight channels. The first step focuses on the lower elixir field, opening the passive and active channels. The second step focuses on the middle elixir field, opening the thrusting channel and the girdling channel. The third step focuses on the upper elixir field, opening the yin-wei, yang-wei, yin-qiao, and yang-qiao. The upper elixir field is the nirvana chamber, the very top of the center of the head.

When you have opened the eight channels, you can use attention to induce and guide energy along them. The thrusting channel is located behind the passive channel. What Esoteric Buddhism calls the central channel is referred to in Taoism as the Yellow Path.

Quiet sitting can also open the eight channels, but it seems that the process is not as quick as with breathing exercise.

The effects of cultivation differ according to individual accomplishment.

Rub in circles around the navel thirty-six times, then rub straight up and down from below the heart to the public bone thirty-six times. This is called energy induction, and can help on the Way.

If you do breathing exercise for thirty minutes to an hour in the early morning, then sit quietly for one or two hours at night, the passive and active channels will naturally open before long.

Breathing exercise can help the ravages of old age. Even after the age of sixty-four, all the way up to eighty or ninety, if you can practice this diligently you can still open up the eight channels.

In the meditation of the Ch'an school you do not focus on any aperture, but forget mental activity and stop thoughts, concentrating on a single clear void. The breathing should gradually be refined into elixir field breathing, continuous and subtle, letting it be natural. One day a channel suddenly opens in the elixir field, and 'primal unified energy' comes in from outside; this is called obtaining medicine. From here you can 'turn the waterwheel' carrying this treasure 'around the cyclic circuit.' All experiences, however, should be set aside and disregarded in order to avoid 'fixation on appearances.'

The method of complete breathing in Indian yoga is to first inhale through the nose very slowly, very subtly, and very quietly, until the lower abdomen swells out. Stop momentarily, then exhale, again through the nose, very slowly, very subtly, and very quietly, until the lower abdomen sinks in. Finally, relax the whole body. This is similar to the method of breathing exercise I talk about.

Yuan-hua-tzu

Yuan-hua-tzu is a Taoist epithet; his real name and origins are unknown. He earned an M.D. in the USA, and practiced medicine in Shanghai and Taiwan, particularly geriatric medicine.

To practice the Way it is necessary to understand the principles first, for only then will you have correct conceptions.

The relationship between the process of practice of the Way and physiology can be illustrated by a simple chart:

Nervous System

- Cerebral nervous system: (voluntary)—quieting—correcting thought (first step of the practical work)
- Sympathetic nervous system: (involuntary)—stabilization—stopping thought (second stage of the practical work).
- Endocrine System: (involuntary) —control—purification—having no thought (third step of the practical work).

What is correcting thought? It means to consider what is correct in your thought; this is called correcting thought, or having no other thought outside

a single thought. The first step of the practical work of cultivating realization is called constructing the foundation, refining the self. This is most difficult to do completely—there are those who strive for ten or twenty years and still have not thoroughly matured it. The scriptures and classics of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are all important sources of exercises for correcting thought. If this first step is done completely, then the second and third steps will follow readily.

‘When there is enough water, a channel forms’—be natural, don’t be hasty. If you hurry, you will have no success.

Lao-tzu said, ‘The Way is patterned on Nature.’ It cannot be forced; you don’t need to set it in order. From beginning to end, those who cultivate realization cannot violate this iron rule of ‘naturalness.’

The desire to open the passes as soon as you enter into esoteric studies is a common affliction of beginners. The more you want to open the passes, the more the passes refuse to open. ‘If you hurry, you won’t succeed.’

As for the main work, the first step is in seeing ‘the opening of the mysterious pass.’

When spirit is full, you naturally do not slumber.

The practice of focusing on an aperture is like having a post to hitch a horse—it's easy to go about it. As for practice without focusing on an aperture, although it is most marvelous, yet when random thoughts occur in confusion, there's no post to hitch onto, so it is extremely hard for the beginner to overcome thoughts. If your will is firm and strong, however, there is no thought you cannot overcome. So here too it is a question of individual effort.

There is also a secret to not focusing on apertures. 'Noncontrivance still involves work.'

Hsiao T'ien-shih's *Essentials of Mysticism* says, "It is easy to get started focusing on an aperture, but hard to realize the final result that way. It is hard to get started without focusing on an aperture, but easy to realize the final result that way.'

When focusing on the lower elixir field, vitality and energy concentrate in the lower parts, so it is easy to leak semen.

It is certainly possible to keep your appearance the same by practicing the Way; all practitioners should have this firm faith. If you are sixty-one, and ten years later your appearance is the same, that means it is stabilized. The meaning of so-called longevity without aging is no more than this.

If you only sit quietly once a day at night and realize no obvious results worth mention, you should keep your mind stable and thoughts still no matter whether you are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, keeping at the Way moment to moment, so that you may make vigorous progress, ‘a thousand miles a day.’

‘The ears, eyes, and mouth are three treasures; close them off, don’t open them up. The real human plunges into the abyss; floating, they keep to the compass center.’ The real human symbolizes spirit; the abyss is a state of complete quietude. The compass center is the central elixir field. Floating means that when doing the practice you should be lively and natural, neither forgetting nor forcing.

Ancestor Lu’s *Hundred Character Tablet* says, “Nurture energy, forgetting words to preserve it. Subdue the mind, acting without contrivance. In

activity and stillness, know the source. With no concern, who else do you seek?” This indicates that practitioners should keep silent to nurture energy at all times in all places, embracing oneness to solidify the spirit. Conquer the mind, concentrating it and returning it to quietude, but don’t try to control it excessively—be lively and natural, acting without contrivance. As for ‘knowing the source in activity and stillness,’ in dealings with society and contacts with other people, you must have inner sovereignty so your spirit does not run outside. When at leisure, with no concerns, that is just right for practice—who would you fuss about looking for? These are principles that practitioners should follow in their everyday lives.

When the first step of the practical work is done thoroughly, the mysterious pass opens spontaneously. The mysterious pass is a superior state that comes after the merging of spirit and energy. What is that state like? When the time comes, you know for yourself. When we speak of it, it is easy to get fixated on characterizations; if you get fixated on characterizations, then the mysterious pass will never open.

The mysterious pass is no different from the main switch of an electrical device; once the mysterious pass opens, then the waterwheel works naturally.

Pai Yu-chan's *Treatise on Clarifying Confusion* says, "If you can be stable in quietude, with no thoughts in your thought, your practice pure, unified, silent all day, like a hen sitting on her eggs, then spirit will return and energy will come back, and naturally you will see the opening of the mysterious pass." This talks about the process of the practice by which the mysterious pass is revealed; it is extremely simple and clear, so please study it carefully.

There is a distinction between real and artificial operation of the waterwheel. Artificial operation depletes the vital spirit—what use is that? So what is real operation? It is necessary to get the energy of true unity; only when the waterwheel carries treasure is it true operation; otherwise it is just a useless exercise. The Buddhist criticism of Taoism lies in this. So Buddhism does not discuss the waterwheel, while the highest vehicle of Taoism, wizardry or Immortalism, also speaks only of the 'mysterious pass' and does not discuss the 'waterwheel.'

'Spirit' is medicine, 'energy' is also medicine; when the two are combined, this is called 'elixir.'

My state is not high, but my elixir field is always warm, twenty-four hours a day, and I haven't gotten sick for the last ten years. Even though my work is busy and complicated, I never get tired out.

The Southern School emphasizes 'work on life' while the Northern Branch emphasizes 'work on essence.' The Southern School seeks efficacy from an 'other,' while in the Northern Branch practice depends on oneself. In the Southern School results are swift, while in the Northern Branch the results are slower. In sum, although the Southern and Northern schools each has its own excellence, the effects they achieve are the same.

By practicing Inner T'ai-chi-ch'uan, some people can discover the mysterious pass, some people can put the waterwheel into operation, while some people practice intensely all their lives with results that are only so-so. This is sufficient to show that the effects of one and the same exercise differ according to the individual.

When work on the Way progresses, you are naturally insightful. Those who cultivate the Way only desiring 'psychic powers' are most easily deceived by others.

‘Put your mind in one place’ and what cannot be done?

Correct your thought time and time again, and the chronic ailments of your internal organs will be relieved. That is why I always tell people that once your thought is correct your body will be sound.

When thought is correct, thoughts stop by themselves. When thoughts stop, thought is inherently not there. My three steps of practice are in reality no more than one step.

Entry into the Way is not a matter of how long you sit quietly; what is most essential is for your spirit not to run outside at any time, twenty-four hours a day.

Anonymous

Called The Professor of the River, this anonymous teacher was a classical polymath, a student of many arts, a master of poetry and literature, and an expert in both Buddhism and Taoism.

In Buddhism, the point of quiet sitting is completeness and fluidity; since one doesn't focus on any aperture, and one doesn't stick to any particular location, presence of mind is everywhere. In Taoism, the emphasis in quiet sitting is step-by-step cultivation, focusing on the lower, middle, and upper fields in order. The course of progress seems to be faster than Buddhism.

The stage of 'refining vitality into energy' usually can be divided into three steps: sowing positive energy, producing positive energy, and harvesting positive energy. Sowing positive energy refers to focusing attention on the lower elixir field. Producing positive energy refers to the first return of positive energy. Harvesting positive energy is so-called 'gathering the elixir and returning it to the furnace.'

The practice of focusing on apertures has never had a fixed pattern; it is necessary to first consider the practitioner's individual nature, experience, level, and so on, before assessing potential and giving instruction, in order

to suit the individual's intelligence and strength. Otherwise, it is only possible to give out ordinary exercises with comparatively few undesirable side effects.

Whether people who cultivate realization go by a transmission from a teacher, or by their own study, differs according to their individual potential, circumstances, talent, and knowledge. If they meet enlightened teachers who give them the right way, and they practice diligently according to instructions, ultimately reaching attainment, these are the most fortunate ones, with superior faculties and inborn virtues. On the other hand, those who have had no opportunity to meet enlightened teachers have no other choice but to study on their own. Even so, they should first be widely read in the alchemical classics, penetrating the principles and processes of cultivating realization, before they set about doing any practices; then they may succeed.

Cutting off thoughts is most difficult. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of methods of cutting off thoughts:

Counting breaths—one exhalation and one inhalation are called one breath; count from one breath to ten, then begin again. If it becomes irksome and

you don't wish to count anymore, or if you get to the point where thoughts naturally do not arise, then stop counting; without counting, thoughts will stop by themselves. This method is good for those who are dull.

Examining thoughts—the things people think of are all empty. Since they are empty, why think of them? When you examine them in this way, you don't stir thoughts lightly or trivially. When you don't stir thoughts lightly or trivially, thoughts stop of themselves without being cut off. This method is best for those who are sharp. Directly awakening, myriad thoughts void, many sages since ancient times immediately attained this kind of excellent state.

Wang Hua-chen

Wang Hua-chen, of unknown origin, served as postmaster in various localities in China.

The paths of Immortalism are divided into ‘immediate’ and ‘gradual.’ The immediate method transcends directly in a single step; from beginning to end, it is not beyond ‘keeping the center’ and ‘returning to emptiness,’ with very few transformations. As for the gradual method, every stage of practice has its task, so it is imperative to proceed gradually, in an orderly manner; one cannot skip ahead.

Generally speaking those who cling to one and do not know how to adapt are not true representatives of the Southern School. After the age of sixty, the original energy has declined to the point where there is no way to deal with the emergency of aging and deterioration except through the Southern School, which has immediate effects.

The intercourse of yin and yang is inconceivable. In the Southern School, malpractice produces illness very easily, from wastage in minor cases to fatality in major cases. You have to be careful.

Those who practice the Southern School have to be very intelligent first of all; second, they have to have strong will. That is because experiences tend to stir the mind—that is the usual human condition. Unless you are a strong man, how can you rein in your horse on the brink of a cliff?

There is nothing occult to speak of in the Southern School; its theory and practice are no more than advanced biology.

‘Without loosening the robe, without undoing the belt’ is the function of ‘subliminal communication through walls.’ This sort of practice is very high; unless refinement has reached a considerable level, no one can attain this marvelous experience of ‘spiritual intercourse.’

Because of the individual differences in people’s constitution and intelligence, the teachings transmitted to them are not entirely the same either. That is why there are so many different branches of Immortalism. So each branch has its strengths, and ought not be dismissed as a ‘side door’ and wiped out.

Young practitioners should certainly not seek efficacy from the Southern School. As for those who practice the ‘clear quiet’ method of the Northern

Branch, once the waterwheel is working there is no need to practice the Southern School.

The perineum is the focal point of the eight channels: first the perineum becomes warm, then two currents of warmth travel down the legs to the soles of the feet, then flow up to the coccyx and the mid-spine, with the force to thrust into the brain. I once heard that it is easy to pass out when the energy goes through the back of the head; at that time I was so shocked I couldn't get through this pass. Even now I regret this. My experience only goes so far—when it comes to the various experiences accompanying ascent of the energy into the brain and its ascent down the throat into the thorax, since I have never had those experiences, I dare not speak at random.

When it comes to 'refining the self,' there is an ancient saying, 'You can't tie down a boat on the bank of a rapids.' You can imagine the peril. 'When two spirits meet, they produce golden broth—bland, without flavor, it is food for angels and humans.' Let me ask—how many people have ever been able to grasp 'bland and flavorless' through and through? Because of this, to be 'mindless of experiences' is most crucial to the Southern School. However, while it may be easy to talk of the state of being 'mindless,' how

can you successfully reach it unless you have thoroughly accomplished the task of self-refinement, and are free from lust in the midst of lust.

Modern polestars of Immortalism say, ‘Make the Northern Branch public, keep the Southern School reserved—the ancient sages and worthies of old all observed this.’ So the Southern School is definitely an esoteric teaching, whose secrets are not casually transmitted—this goes back a long way.

‘One energy circulates from the perineum to the brain’—this state should be realized properly.

The passive and active channels are the main line, the principal current; the others are minor routes, branch currents.

Regarding focus on apertures, the Southern School takes this as a gradual method, with changes and stages that cannot be skipped over. The four apertures transmitted by Professor Ch’en Kuo-li are orthodox Taoist methods of practice, without a doubt, but the question is whether one focuses on the apertures correctly or not—so the subtlety of application is up to the individual. ‘Going too far is like not going far enough.’

Everything is like this, not only alchemy. Since ancient times it has been

said that the ‘firing process’ is not transmitted; it’s not that it’s not transmitted, but there is really no way to express it in words or writing. (note: The four apertures mentioned here are: 1) the pineal gland; 2) the pubic bone; 3) the penis; 4) the perineum. Their application in the Southern School is usually to focus first on the penis, second on the pubic bone, third on the perineum, and fourth on the coccyx.)

‘If you don’t know the apertures of heaven and earth, you cannot know the mystic secret.’ The aperture of heaven is the nirvana, the aperture of earth belongs to the reproductive system. Of the four apertures made public by Professor Ch’en Kuo-li, aside from the first one the other three apertures are all earth apertures. All alchemical systems go from below to above.

‘Shutting off the road to the Yellow Springs, burst open the gates of the Violet Treasury.’ This means starting from the ‘lower elixir field’ to attain completion by way of the ‘upper elixir field.’ Now Professor Ch’en starts from the ‘pineal gland,’ or so-called ‘upper elixir field,’ but this produces unhealthy reactions time and again. In Indian yoga, not only do they not generally transmit the upper openings in the head, they even leave aside the openings (called chakras in yoga) in the middle, only teaching beginners to focus on the spot of gathering, which is what Chinese Taoists call the ‘lower

elixir field.’ Therefore it is said, ‘Open the door of earth below, and you open the pass of heaven above.’

The Southern School also uses the ‘lower elixir field’ for a base, but it differs in requiring the use of a female partner. This is much harder to control than ‘focus on apertures’—if one partner is not careful, it will be harmful to both.

What are lead and mercury? ‘Mercury’ is above, associated with ‘essence,’ while ‘lead’ is below, associated with ‘life.’ ‘Essence’ is ‘spirit,’ while ‘life’ is ‘energy.’ When ‘spirit’ and ‘energy’ are combined into one, heaven and humanity enter into partnership; then the task of Immortalism is done.

Liu Ho-chun

Liu Ho-chun was the wife of Professor Wu Chun-ch'ueh, a transmitter of the school of Taoism known as the Western Branch.

Quiet sitting can increase intelligence.

When the breath is tuned, then the spirit congeals; when the spirit congeals, then thoughts cease.

‘Be mindless in face of objects’—there is a clear admonition from ancient times. During quiet sitting, all inner experiences should be ignored.

Han Chung-kang

Han Chung-kang was a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine.

If you want to construct the foundation, you have to do at least three months of quiet exercise to complete it. This ‘quiet exercise’ begins with remembrance of Buddha according to the Pure Land school of Buddhism. Remembrance of Buddha is a nondual method whereby you go from thought to no thought. When you remembrance Buddha, don’t do it out loud; just silently remember the holy name, saying ‘Hail to the Buddha of Infinite Light’ in your heart. Embrace the elixir field with your hands, remembrancing here, contemplating here, listening here, breathing here. When these four merge into one, then the construction of the foundation can be completed. When the foundation is complete, then opening the three passes, turning the water wheel, and indeed the whole work of the minor cycle, will all come about in order.

Professor Zhu

At the time of this interview, professor Zhu was a practitioner cultivating Taoism while working in the ordinary world.

Focusing on apertures within the body, places such as between the eyebrows, the bridge of the nose, the tip of the nose, the elixir field, the umbilical sphere, the perineum, the coccyx, and so on, is all lesser vehicle work.

Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching* should be memorized, and then silently repeated; after a long time of this eventually you will spontaneously experience a sublime state of mental accord and spiritual knowledge.

Buddhists recite Buddha names, Taoists recite spells; these are most convenient methods—you recite until you don't know or feel, spontaneously producing a single thought; this is called 'correct thought.' If you keep 'correct thought,' then you can work on transcendence.

Teng Hsi

Teng Hsi is identified only as a high-level employee of a certain unnamed organization.

I once joined the Dragon Sand sect of Taoism. The practice of this sect has nine levels in all, going from tension to relaxation, but the whole process is not beyond the following four secrets:

1. Grasping (holding fast).
2. Focusing (concentrating somewhat).
3. Noticing (just being aware).
4. Looking (observing from afar).

The first level of work can also be divided into three steps:

1. Concentrating on the spot between the eyebrows.
2. Concentrating on the bridge of the nose.
3. Concentrating on the elixir field.

Demons come from one's own mind. 'Demon-quelling spells' work for the ignorant, but not for the more intelligent, who cannot be induced to have faith.

When you are troubled, don't sit. When you have mixed-up thoughts, don't sit. The Great Way is natural—you shouldn't sit if there is any forcing. If you practice strictly in this way, then eventually you'll naturally have no thought.

One minute without thought, and you gain one minute's benefit.

It is possible to gain access to the first step of practice by any method; there is no orthodox or unorthodox.

Quiet sitting requires firm faith and single-mindedness. If you mix doubt with faith, changing your mind whenever you something different, then you'll never succeed all your life.

Walking, standing, sitting, lying down, gather the mind back to stillness.

When it is still, the breath is subtle; when unnoticeable, it naturally forms utterly natural inner breathing. Spirit enters energy, energy enfolds spirit—this is the sitting method of 'mind and breath resting on each other.'

Before quiet sitting, first gaze at a point in front of you, until the light of your eyes focuses steadily and your vital spirit is unified; close your eyes

after that. This seems to be the meaning of the saying ‘Don’t close your eyes at random while your mind is not yet clear.’

Hou K'un-i

Hou K'un-i was a doctor of Chinese medicine.

The highest alchemy requires a vegetarian diet. Otherwise, even if you crystallize the elixir, it will only be phantom elixir. After three years, the blood will be pure; after twelve years, the energy will be pure.

What is most essential for seekers of the Way is to ‘purify the mind and lessen desires.’

In quiet sitting, when utterly empty and thoroughly silent, the mind is naturally empty. When the mind is empty, then true energy will well up.

The method of quiet sitting is extremely simple and extremely easy. The eyes gaze at the nose, the nose looks to the heart; first focus on the lower elixir field, then the energy sinks into the perineum—this is called ‘returning to the root with each breath.’

Don’t tune your breathing while quiet sitting; respiration should be allowed to be natural.

In the beginning, in the lower field, there is merely sign of movement; next, entering into the middle field, you see the real 'I.' Finally, moving to the upper field, the gates of heaven open, and the yang spirit emerges.

It takes one year in youth, three years in middle age, and twice that in old age.

If you work at your job on the one hand while cultivating purification on the other, harmonizing with the ordinary world, you can still arrive at fulfillment; but you must be easygoing and balanced, simple and unaffected; body and mind should not be subjected to too much stress.

'Bathing' means surrounding spirit and energy with attention, not letting them run outside.

Shen Shu-wen

Shen Shu-wen was a teacher of esoteric Buddhism.

The simplest and easiest way to stop thoughts is counting breaths. One exhalation and one inhalation constitute one breath. Count each breath from one to ten, then start over again. After a long time at this, eventually thoughts will stop of themselves.

Don't practice quiet sitting when you're too full or too tired; as it is said, 'Not only is it useless—it's even harmful.'

Quiet sitting requires a balance between relaxation and tension. If you too tense, then you break down; if too relaxed, you slack off.

In quiet sitting, the backbone should be straight, so energy can rise up. Therefore the crown of the head and the anus should form a straight vertical line. It is imperative to be natural, however, and not apply force.

In quiet sitting, it is enough just to be able to keep an ethereal awareness present alone, not falling into 'insensate voidness.'

Ch'en Wu-jen

Ch'en Wu-jen was manager of a fuel company.

Lead and mercury are body and mind, body and mind are heaven and earth.

Any seeking for practices outside the body is deviant. Therefore it is said, 'There is no Way outside the body.'

Below the heart and above the navel is called the central elixir field. It is also called the central chamber, the crimson chamber, and the gold palace. This is the secret opening that has never been transmitted throughout history. If you can inwardly gaze into the central chamber, stabilizing the spirit in the elixir in the center, keeping attention on the central field, then within three days, or a month or half a year, the so-called eight channels—in front and behind, above and below, and right and left—will all open in succession. Therefore reversal of awareness in inner gazing must be focused in the central field. Those who focus on the lower field can hardly avoid involuntary emissions and wet dreams.

Ku-yang-tzu

Ku-yang-tzu took an interest in Taoism when still very young. He and Ma Ho-yang received orthodox transmission of the Western Branch of Taoism from Professor Wu Chun-ch'ueh. He was also known for his talent in classical painting, said to rival the greatest professionals of the time in sophistication.

The first step of the practice of the Western Branch is not beyond 'stabilizing the spirit, tuning the breath.'

The practice of the Western Branch is extremely simple and extremely easy; there are no hexagrams or lines, no pounds or ounces; it is not inside the body, not outside the body. It is the easiest way to see the 'opening of the mysterious pass,' and it is also possible to activate the 'waterwheel'—its power is outstanding.

Stabilizing the spirit in the main aperture, seemingly there, seemingly not, forgetting everything in quietude, although the state is high, still you don't fall into insensate void—here is the subtlety.

Don't fixate attention on any internal experiences—this is the essential secret of the Western Branch.

In the practice of the Western Branch, first of all don't stick to thoughts.

The *Ts'an T'ung Ch'i* says, 'To have no thought is constancy.' When the mind is quiet, thoughts stop; every exercise should be like this. Second, don't fixate on the body. Whether inner experiences are good or bad, leave them be and don't be concerned with them; just keep the spirit steady in the main opening before the eyes. As soon as the mind pursues experiences, this is no longer its primal state, but has fallen into the temporal.

Keep the spirit steady in the main opening consistently, until primal energy comes; it naturally chases off the negative energy in the body, cleaning it out, so that the negative becomes positive.

The practice of the Western Branch can be called the supreme one vehicle's method of refining the physical by means of true emptiness. It can be practiced while walking, sitting, standing, and lying down.

The practice of this branch differs from other practices in its method of opening. When you achieve opening, the energy in the whole body

pervades everywhere.

The Northern Branch has both a clear purity approach and a yin-yang approach; the same holds true for the Southern School.

It is also possible to graft in the clear purity approach; the practice of focus on the middle is one of the methods of grafting. When elderly or sickly practitioners do this kind of exercise, they can restore youthfulness.

When energy stirs in the belly, first draw it from the perineum up to the lower field; then when energy thrusts into the region of the heart, then consciously lead it back to the lower field. Repeat this over and over again a number of times, until a peculiar itch develops in the heart; then stop, and guide the energy into the coccyx, then up the spine through the active channel. Following this route, from front to back, is a method of practice that has a basis and has a source.

Not focusing on apertures, not tuning the breathing, empty to the utmost, quiet as can be, not a single thought arises—this is the practice of the higher vehicle.

Sickness caused by Taoist practices cannot be cured by medicine; only the practice of quiet concentration 'returning to emptiness' can cure it.

Focusing on the 'mountain base' opening easily produces hallucinations, but it seems it is not entirely useless for training in 'freezing the spirit.'

At first, when random thoughts fly about in profusion, then focus intently on the aperture; then when the mind is clear and thoughts are few, gradually relax. Only by alternation like this can you avoid fixation and sickness.

It is quite right to keep to the cave of empty nothingness, but don't leave it for a moment. Otherwise, if you are inconsistent, you will not be able to find this cave.

Taoist practice does not require vegetarianism. You need a lot of nutrition at first, like meat and fish. First you have to have a strong physical body; only then can you attain the primal subtle Way. In the future, when your practice deepens, you will naturally lose your taste for flesh.

By focusing on the middle field you can include the upper field; by focusing on the upper field you can include the middle and lower fields.

Not only is this simple and quick, but the potential for danger is also minimized.

In the true transmission of the gold elixir, the man does not open his robe, the woman does not remove her belt. Although this is the higher vehicle of the yin-yang approach, if you want to obtain the celestial treasure, without great virtue how can you dare hope for it?

When quiet sitting reaches the point where there is no person and no self, and you forget all about matter, then you are not far from the ‘mysterious pass.’

When beautiful states occur during quiet sitting, don’t be delighted, lest your practice deteriorate and the states disappear.

‘Attain the one, and all tasks are done.’ The ‘one’ means that myriad differences return to one root. The one root has no yin-yang opposition; it can only be attained by emptiness, and can only be maintained by emptiness.

Artificial exertive qigong seems contrary to the Way; uncontrived natural qigong is not out of harmony with the Way.

Chang Tzu-yang's *Understanding Reality* says, 'Let the other be the host, let the self be the guest.' The 'other' is the main aperture; it is that which should not be left unattended even for a moment.

If you practice quiet sitting when angry or right after you've been angry, it is very easy to cause illness. Be careful!

There are many kinds of external exercise. The exercise is outside the body, but the effect is inside the body. Whether doing external exercises, or the exercise of cutting off thought and forgetting mental activity, all experiences—internal or external—should be ignored; otherwise you'll get fixated, and if you get fixated you either regress or get sick.

Ma Ho-yang

A cousin of Ku-yang-tzu, Ma Ho-yang was also a disciple of Professor Wu of the Western Branch of Taoism.

The term ‘leakage’ does not have just one meaning. When thoughts arise, that is ‘leakage.’ Joy and anger are ‘leakage.’ Involuntary emissions of semen, as usually referred to, are only one kind of ‘leakage.’ Seeing is leakage of the eyes, hearing is leakage of the ears, smelling is leakage of the nose, pleasure is leakage of the mind. There are too many kinds of leakage to mention them all. Chang Tzu-yang said, ‘Even a halo behind the head is illusion; even if clouds rise under your feet, you’re still not an immortal.’ Whenever you have experiences like this, you should see them without seeing, hear without hearing, notice without noticing; leave them all alone and don’t deal with them—then you naturally won’t leak.

Ancestor Lü once taught students that cultivating the Way is not beyond the follow four steps:

1. Forgetting the body to nurture energy—this is obtaining the medicine.
2. Forgetting energy to solidify the spirit—this is crystallizing the elixir pill.
3. Forgetting the spirit to return to emptiness—this is projecting the spirit.
4. Forgetting emptiness to return to reality—this is refining emptiness.

Cultivating the Way is returning to the origin, going back to the source. The origin and source is the original face. The original face is the primal state before our human essence and life are divided.

What is 'essence'? To talk about 'essence,' we have to start with 'mind,' and if we want to talk about 'mind' we have to start with 'thought.' If people go along with thoughts, then they can never escape fluctuation and change. As you can see, the first sprouting of a single thought is where the submission of the ordinary man and the defiance of the sage part ways.

Avoiding grain is a minor art. When the alchemical pill is formed, energy is full; you avoid grain naturally, so why work at this minor art.

The purpose of cultivating the Way is to understand life and escape death.

What does 'embracing the one' mean? What is the 'one'? It means the original essence, awake and aware.

When the mind dies, that means there is nothing on your mind, and your mind isn't dwelling on anything.

Cultivation of essence means refining the mind, rejecting the false and returning to the real, thereby restoring its original purity.

Walking very, very slowly freezing the spirit and calming the breathing, stopping once every three steps, going nowhere, is called ‘walking meditation.’ This method is quite marvelous—its effects are in no way inferior to ‘sitting meditation.’

The point where thoughts die out is called ‘the opening of the mysterious pass.’ The merging of spirit and energy is where creation comes from; this can also be called the ‘mysterious pass.’ Obtaining the medicine, crystallizing the elixir, restoring the elixir, leaving the womb, and spiritualization all have an intimate connection with the ‘mysterious pass.’ After attaining the Way, everywhere is the ‘mysterious pass.’ Water flowing, flowers bloom, birds chattering, insects humming—all of them are natural emanations of the ‘mysterious pass.’

Li Jen

At the time of these remarks, Li Jen was living in seclusion, concentrating only on Taoist practice.

When first practicing quiet sitting, the breathing should just be left as it is naturally. After a long time, as the mind grows quieter the breath grows finer, until the ordinary breath in the nose and mouth naturally becomes still after three years.

Sleeping sitting, sleeping lying down, folding the legs, not folding the legs, sitting after waking up, lying down again after sitting—everything should be allowed to be natural, not at all forced.

If you sit quietly for two hours every day in the early morning and at night, not only can you stop leakage, you can even come back to life from the brink of death. But it won't do to be inconsistent.

The passive and active channels open of themselves when the power of practice is deep, even if you don't seek to open them. Their unnatural opening is not real opening, and is not worthwhile.

To be ever responsive yet always calm is ‘practice.’ To let go of all mental objects is ‘practice.’

In my daily quiet sitting, I don’t focus on any aperture at all; with no post to tie the horse, it is not easy to do. But focus on apertures is a contrived method, while not focusing on apertures is an uncontrived method. The uncontrived method is the practice of the supreme one vehicle; if you do it for a long time, the waterwheel will self-activate.

The ordinary waterwheel is the circulation of energy. The circulation of energy is easy compared to the circulation of spirit.

Mao Chiao-min

Mao Chiao-min abandoned a career in government to concentrate on Taoism. At the time of these remarks he was 87 years old and in good health.

Dissolving the ‘conscious spirit’ and nurturing the ‘original spirit’ is what constitutes genuine practice.

The warming of the elixir field may be in the realm of the temporal, yet it still has a considerable effect.

The medicine is a transformation of vitality, energy, and spirit. It is necessary to be utterly empty and quiet without a single thought arising, before there is any medicine to speak of or any medicine to gather.

After obtaining the medicine, gradually refine it, gradually stabilize it, and it will crystallize into elixir. If thoughts are not emptied, how can the elixir crystallize?

The more the sweet saliva in the mouth, the better; swallow it slowly, and it will naturally transmute energy.

Only when myriad thoughts are emptied can one be told about ‘life exercises.’

Those whose accomplishment in sitting is excellent not only have glowing skin, their energy pervades the hundred channels and expands into the four limbs.

When practice is profound, you naturally lose your taste for meat and take to vegetarian food.

Yu An-teng

Yu An-teng's introduction to Taoist practices centered around his own illness and healing. He contracted tuberculosis as a youth in Japan, where he had gone for secular schooling at the age of eighteen. Returning to China after recovering in a Japanese hospital, he subsequently went to Southeast Asia, where he worked as a teacher. Unable to tolerate the hot climate, he came down with tuberculosis again two years later. He went back to China and secluded himself in a mountain monastery to practice quiet sitting, curing himself in three months. A later bout of illness led him to take up another method of quiet sitting, the Commonweal Society's practice of keeping attention on the bridge of the nose. In the 1920's he entered a Taoist cloister to advance his practice. There used a different method, sitting on a seat 9.6 inches high, with both feet on the ground and both palms on the knee caps, supposedly like a fetus in the womb; this he called 'primal sitting,' and focused on the point between the eyebrows. He subsequently became the editor of the cloister's philosophy journal, which emphasized reconciliation of all religions. Eventually he became an editor for a commercial publishing house. He was a noted expert on Buddhism, and in later years lectured on Buddhist sutras at the request of Buddhist groups in Taiwan. He was also an expert on Islam.

Among the methods of health maintenance of past and present, Chinese and otherwise, none is better than Taoism. This teaching first gives importance to opening the passive and active channels. The passive is associated with yin, the active with yang; the passive is in front, the active in back. The passive begins at the lower teeth and ends in the elixir field; the active begins in the elixir field and ends at the upper teeth. The passive channels goes downward, the active channel goes upward. (The passive is the circulatory system, the active is the nervous system).

Introductory methods of Taoism emphasize focus on apertures. Buddhists mostly focus on the aperture right between the eyebrows, while Taoists mostly focus on the aperture right between the eyes. If you draw a line back from the point between the eyes into the middle of the brain, the center of the intersection is what modern biologists call the pituitary gland. Focusing on this during quiet sitting can preserve youth and prevent aging.

Also, about an inch from the intersection of a horizontal line straight back from the aperture between the eyebrows and a vertical line extending directly down from the crown of the head, there is the so-called nirvana chamber, the upper elixir field, in modern times called the pineal gland. People of middle age or older who focus on this can restore the organic

functions of the physical body, and also control sexual impulses. ... When you focus, however, you should be relaxed and natural, just generally keeping aware of the area with unadulterated attention.

‘Everything is fabricated by mind.’ Work on essence is more critical than work on life.

There is a sect of Taoism that focuses on the nirvana chamber alone from start to finish.

The *Diamond Sutra* says, “Activate the mind without dwelling on anything.” If it dwells on something, it is false mind; if it does not dwell on anything, then it is the true mind. The true mind is the original nature as it is. The false mind is negative, the true mind is positive. When the negative dissolves, then naturally there is pure positivity. Therefore Buddhism and Taoism are the same in ‘leaving the false and returning to the true.’

T’ien-lai-tzu’s *Green Dragon Song* says, “If you want to practice, get used to patience; spit in the face will dry by itself, so don’t retaliate.” Lao-tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* teaches ‘noncontention,’ which builds character, and also

enables a practitioner to always keep a harmonious and peaceful state of mind, avoiding interference with practice.

Lin Sung-ch'ing

Lin Sung-ch'ing was a lay brother practicing in a Buddhist monastery at the time of these remarks.

The Primal Teaching is similar to the practice of the Wu-Yang sect; the first step generally transmitted is the 'incense gazing method,' having practitioners gaze steadily at the burning tip of an incense stick as they sit, freezing the spirit there with each exhalation and each inhalation. This is one method of eliminating thoughts.

Tuning the breathing is one method of stopping thoughts, but it should be relaxed and natural. When you tune it until there is nothing more to tune, then thoughts also stop.

Concentrating on the Pure Land method of Buddha-remembrance until remembrance goes on spontaneously without remembering, then spirit and energy merge. This is also referred to as a practice of 'paired cultivation of essence and life.'

The T'ien-t'ai stopping and seeing method divides the apertures into five kinds:

1. The nirvana—easily produces illness.
2. The bridge of the nose—easily induces concentration.
3. The umbilical sphere—cannot induce concentration.
4. The elixir field, also called the ocean of energy—easily accesses concentration.
5. The welling spring—not easy to concentrate.

Ke Chung-ho

Ke Chung-ho practiced Taoism for several years in a cloister before taking over the management of a silk factory in western China at the request of a friend. At last report he was living in the mountains somewhere abroad, cultivating Taoist practices.

During quiet sitting, whatever aperture you focus on you should be relaxed and natural; if you cling too much, eventually blood and energy will stagnate, easily producing weird illnesses.

If you are relaxed and comfortable when you sit, that proves this method is suitable for your body and mind, and you can continue with the practice. If you feel uncomfortable or even pained, then you should carefully consider and switch to another method, or ask someone who is highly enlightened before you practice, so that you may avoid negative side effects.

Mind and breath resting on each other is the best method. The mind is unruly, however, and it is hard for beginners to get them to rest on each other.

Counting breaths, concentrating on the elixir field, and the method of mind and breath resting on each other, can all stop thoughts.

Mental abstraction is the highest practice of Taoism; this is the original spirit, not hallucination. Such an advanced state gets subtler and subtler the longer you continue it. If it turns to clear awareness, then it becomes the conscious spirit, which is useless to continue.

Hsiao T'ien-shih

Hsiao T'ien-shih began reading classics with his father as a child.

Developing an early attraction to the works of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, he also studied martial arts as he grew up. He began to practice Ch'an meditation under the guidance of a Buddhist monk who cured him of a serious illness that doctors of both Chinese and Western traditions had been unable to treat and pronounced fatal. His teacher later told him to study Taoist meditation as well, and he subsequently worked with Taoists of several different schools.

When not a single thought occurs, only that is true quietude.

At the beginning of quiet sitting, both eyes should gaze at the bridge of the nose for a little while, then focus on the 'elixir field' below the navel, enabling the fire of mind to descend. After that, then keep the spirit in the 'nirvana,' forgetting impulses and cutting off thoughts, so there is just a single empty awareness, mystically merged with myriad transformations.

When you sit to the point where you reach quietude, the breath is natural fine, long, deep, and even; and it sinks down into the elixir field.

If random thoughts occur uncontrollably during quiet sitting, massage the soles of your feet one hundred and eight times, or rub your hands together to make them warm and then massage the eyes, or lift up your feet and massage your limbs, or even get off your seat and walk around a little while and then sit again. If you train yourself this way over and over, eventually thoughts will naturally be few, and it will be easy to sit quietly.

Remembrance of Buddha and listening to the breathing can also stop thoughts.

Whether walking, standing still, sitting, or lying down, hold up correct thought. What is correct thought? It means just having one thought, with no other thoughts.

Picking up, putting down, seeing the vanity—all Taoists should have this courage!

The practice done in quiet sitting can be done sitting up by the middle-aged, but for the elderly it's all right to do it lying down.

The higher the vehicle, the simpler and easier it is—Buddhism is like this, and so is Taoism.

Taoist practice is all a matter of ‘quiet.’ Quietude is a method of nonduality that molds body and mind; it can stabilize the foundation of life, and also clarify the ocean of essence. The *Scripture of Clarity and Quietude* says, “If people can always be clear and quiet, heaven and earth will submit to them.” It is really so.

Gradual opening of the passes and apertures by energy induction methods is one way of opening the passes. Opening up the eight channels all at once by plenitude of energy is another way.

Opening the passes and apertures is not the main issue; the key is all in ‘nurturing positive energy.’ Keep reducing until you reach nothing, then nothing produces something, which is spirit. So not looking too much, not listening too much, not talking too much, keeping pure of heart and having few desires—this is the way to nurture positive energy. Also, during quiet sitting, when there are no random thoughts in the mind, only a single open awareness, when quietude peaks positive energy is born—this too is a way of nurturing positive energy.

Those who study the Southern School have different individual experiences, and the transmissions of the teachers are not the same.

The Northern Branch practice of clarity and quietude may be less powerful and less rapid, but if you persist it builds up bit by bit, and you can still attain the Way, without a doubt.

In Taoist practice, nine out of ten focus on apertures, but *True Teachings of Immortalism* refers to the practice of the Wenshi Branch as extremely simple and easy, not focusing on any aperture at all. It is not easy to get into it, however, unless you have a high level of capacity.

During quiet sitting, when emptiness peaks and quietude is total, real fire spontaneously arises in the elixir field.

The Green City Branch's higher practice that does not focus on openings may be somewhat difficult to begin, and somewhat slow to produce results, but when the power of the practice comes about, it has the marvelous function of 'myriad apertures opening at once.'

When things happen, they ‘exist.’ When things are over, they are ‘nonexistent.’ They are like moving clouds, like flowing water—leave everything to nature. This is how the daily practice of a Taoist should be.

Viewing the whole text of the *Classic of Wenshi*, the essentials of its path are no more than this: empty nothing is the basis, nurturing essence is the source; emptiness means no form, nothingness means no fixation—therefore it is possible for vitality and energy to merge into one, mind and essence merge into one, body and spirit merge into one, so you naturally transcend to the realm of sages.

But it is most difficult to begin the practice of the great path of empty nothingness according to the Wenshi Branch. It is all in cultivating true positive energy in oneself to connect with the true positive energy in the universe. At first there seems to be no boundary, as if there were no place to set foot; in reality it is only necessary to keep doing the exercise, and you can naturally come to realize there is solidity in emptiness, there is a reality in nothingness.

Wenshi, Keeper of the Pass, said, “Possessing nothing at all, contriving nothing at all, clinging to nothing at all, nothing at all is obtained; this is the

climax of emptiness, and the climax of nothingness.” One who can be like this “does not see the sky above, does not see the earth below, does not see the self within, does not see others outside—so self communes with the universe, the universe communes with the self.” So there is also emphasis on ‘detachment from consciousness,’ ‘detachment from knowledge,’ ‘merging others and self, identifying with the universe.’

The way to start the practice is a matter of submerging thought, feelings, and consciousness entirely into ‘empty nothingness.’

True Teachings on Immortalism says, “The *Classic of Wenshi* says, ‘If you can see the vital spirit, you prolong life; if you can forget the vital spirit, you transcend life.’ When you forget the vital spirit, emptiness peaks and quietude is total; vitality spontaneously transmutes into energy, energy spontaneously transmutes into spirit, and spirit spontaneously returns to emptiness. This is the learning of the great way of empty nothingness. As for seeing the vital spirit, empty quietude is the basis, the firing process is the function; refining vitality into energy, refining spirit into emptiness, this is the art of driving energy by spirit. As for learning the great way of empty nothingness, though one does not cling to vital energy, yet one merges with the way in reality, physically and mentally sublimated, being or not being,

hiding or appearing, transforming incomprehensibly, life without measure; this is spontaneously realizing life after having realized essence, including the lower in the upper. When you drive energy by spirit, then you're fixed on vital energy. But if you maintain fundamental peacefulness, it circulates ceaselessly, and the harmony produces a steaming and liquefying effect that can also cause the physical to merge with the spiritual, living long without dying; this is comprehending life, such that essence survives thereby. This is working upward from below.”

True Teachings of Immortalism also says, “The three passes, going from ‘effort’ to ‘effortlessness’ constitute the gradual method. Cultivating one pass including the lower two passes is the sudden method. Now it is just necessary to proceed directly to the work of refining spirit back into emptiness; when emptiness is consummate and quietude total, vitality spontaneously converts into energy, energy spontaneously converts into spirit—the handle is in your hand, life is up to you to make. The pass of refining spirit back into emptiness is most simple and easy, most direct and swift.”

The Green City Branch is based on the twin cultivation of the Southern School; it is similar to the Sanfeng Branch, but it has even more of the

marrow of the Wenshi Branch. All of its practice is based on ‘emptiness’ and rooted in ‘nothingness.’ Experienced and realized from ‘empty nothingness,’ you can realize it forever with one realization, attaining it forever with one attainment. At first it seems there is no where to start, but once you get into it and obtain the secret, then you can transcend immediately, entering directly, to find it wide as the sea and open as the sky, penetrating everywhere.

The Green City Branch derives from Lao-tzu’s teaching of ‘utter emptiness, total quietude.’ When utterly empty, you are aware; when totally quiet, you are clear. All practical applications, psychic powers, and states of transformation come about based on ‘emptiness, quietude, awareness, and clarity.’ ‘In emptiness myriad things are stored; in quietude there are heaven and earth.’ If people can reach the point where not a single thought arises, and they are not affected by anything, then original positivity spontaneously grows, true energy is naturally produced, and endless evolution, endless experiences, are inherent therein.

When the Green City Branch transmits the way of the higher vehicle, what it teaches is just this ‘nothing,’ and in the end not even this ‘nothing’ exists. Everything is let go—there is no sky, no earth, no others, no self, no things,

no events, no success, no failure, no gain, no loss, no conceptions, no thoughts, no mind, no intention, no rule, no path—this is the eternal void that is merged with the universe but never decays.

The Adept of Green City said, “The way of culling and augmenting is not the sexual act of culling yin to augment yang; it is culling the energy of heaven and earth to augment your own energy, culling the vitality of heaven and earth to augment your own vitality, culling the spirit of heaven and earth to augment your own spirit. Based on the developmental processes of heaven and earth, you carry out your own development; based on the life of heaven and earth, you extend your own life. The energy of heaven and earth is unceasing, so your own energy is also unceasing. The evolution of heaven and earth does not stop, so your own evolution does not stop either. The life of heaven and earth does not decay, so your life does not decay either. Based on the ceaseless renewal of heaven and earth, you accomplish your own ceaseless renewal; so as the order of nature is constantly renewed, so is your life constantly renewed.”

Some Taoist practitioners focus on apertures, some do not focus on apertures. There are some who focus on emptiness instead of apertures, and there are some who don't focus either on apertures or on emptiness.

Focusing on apertures is easy to begin with, but final realization is difficult.

Not focusing on apertures is hard to begin with, but final realization is easy. Focusing on apertures is easy to teach and learn; teaching and learning without focus on apertures is hard.

Father Ou-yang Ching-yu

A Catholic priest, Father Ou-yang was a graduate of Peking University and was the head of a theological seminary. He learned his Taoist method from a man reputed to have cured himself of a fatal illness by quiet sitting, to be able to punch with supernatural power in spite of never having studied martial arts, and to be able to cure illnesses by massage. He had hundreds of disciples, of whom Father Ou-yang was said to be among the few who mastered his method.

My method is simply and easy to practice, unlike the usual methods of quiet sitting.

First of all, posture is not an issue: it doesn't matter whether you place your hands on top of each other or fold them, and it doesn't matter whether you cross your legs or not.

Second, since there is no circulation of energy, breathing should be left natural. If you can be utterly empty and totally quiet, then energy will circulate spontaneously without your circulating it.

Third, there is no focus on apertures either. Whenever thought is concentrated on one spot, that is called ‘focus.’ If you focus on the lower elixir field, it is certainly easy to see results, but if you focus on it improperly, you can hardly avoid making yourself ill; the harmful side effects of focusing on the apertures in the head are the most serious.

Fourth, there is no use of force. The whole body should be relaxed; if forced, there is no effect.

In sum, what is most essential in my method is ‘not thinking,’ that’s all. But while the work of ‘not thinking’ is easy to talk about, the mind is hard to control without something to tie it down, and a stream of thought will keep flowing even if you cut through it for a moment. The more you think of ‘not thinking,’ on the contrary the more readily you think. So how do you deal with this? It’s just a matter of interrupting thought the moment you notice it; when it comes back after the interruption, then interrupt it again. Stop one out of ten, and eventually you can reach the goal bit by bit. If you persist, eventually you will be able to shut off thought and stop cogitation. No matter how numerous your thoughts, through it all you should just keep the same attitude of detachment, and you will naturally forget them all.

In the practice of the Commonweal Society, the first step is to look down at a single point. The second step is to look straight ahead at a single point. The third step is to withdraw the gaze to the bridge of the nose. The fourth step is to reverse the gaze to the center of the head. The fifth step is to gaze inwardly at the midspine. The sixth step is ‘nongazing.’ My practice, however, starts right out at ‘nongazing.’ When sitting, the eyes should be lightly closed, neither looking inwardly nor focusing outwardly.

If you doze off during quiet sitting, that doesn’t matter—the effect is the same.

The tongue doesn’t rest on the upper palate, and the teeth don’t need to be clenched; just close the mouth lightly, that’s all.

The head must be straight. The back should be allowed to be natural at first; when the practice deepens, the back will naturally become straight as a pillar.

My method should not be practiced along with other sitting methods of the various cults; otherwise, not only will it be ineffective, but in extreme cases

untoward side effects will occur.

According to my method, you can sit any time, even after a meal—in fact, it will even help digestion. Sitting can also be used as a substitute for a summer siesta.

My method can be divided into two forms, sitting and standing. The standing form of practice is similar to the sitting form, and shouldn't be deliberately restrained, allowing for spontaneous movement.

The period of quiet sitting should be at least an hour at a time. If the time is too short, then it's hard to get results.

The longer the period of quiet sitting, naturally the more refined it becomes. But if you are vexed and disturbed then you shouldn't force yourself to continue. At such times you should get up and stroll around to relax, then sit again after that; or else sleep a little while before sitting. Then you will be clear minded, and the practice will be effective.

Quiet sitting can cure illnesses. A light cold can be cured in just one sitting. Other illnesses can also be cured by quiet sitting.

My palm is no different from that of an ordinary man, and I don't feel any special heat, but when I massage the afflicted part of someone who's ailing, I easily see results every time. However, it is very easy to use up one's own basic energy curing illnesses, so don't be too eager to try it.

During quiet sitting, sweat pours like rain, more and more the more you sit. You should have a hand towel ready to wipe yourself dry. This is a process one has to go through in quiet sitting, so don't mistakenly fear it to be a sign of illness.

In my method of sitting, the whole body, upper and lower, is warm and pleasant, not just the elixir field.

My method does not concern the 'waterwheel' or 'crystallization of elixir.'

When you sit, 'not thinking' may take effort at first, but eventually it becomes natural.

Quiet sitting may be substituted for sleep. At first you sit relatively little and sleep relatively much, but eventually you can go all night without

sleeping and yet experience an even deeper degree of rest than sleep. I haven't slept for many years; in fact, I'm uncomfortable if I sleep. But this should be practiced gradually; don't try to get to it in one leap!

My method has no fixed format—there are all sorts of postures, differing according to the individual—but it actually has the inherent ability to cure illness.

Two points are most critical to my sitting method:

1. Every time you sit, you should sit at least one hour; only then can it be effective.
2. Keep the one thought of 'not thinking of anything' as correct thought, rejecting all random thoughts; keep a single awareness alone, not falling into withered up 'insensate void.'

'The Way is patterned on Nature.' My sitting method follows this supreme rule—don't apply any force at all, just let it all be natural.

To 'stop thinking and forget mental activity' should be developed gradually, without overemphasis. If you want to think, then think; don't worry about

it at all, because when you have practiced for a long time your thinking will stop by itself.

During quiet sitting, not only should your body be completely relaxed, your brain should also be completely relaxed.

Inner gazing and outer gazing both involve fixation; if you're fixated, you can't be completely quiet, so how can you arrive at the realm of transformation?

When you practice quietude in a quiet environment, that is certainly all well and good, but when you practice quietude in a noisy situation you get even more benefit.

Besides quiet sitting, I always take walks outdoors, combining inner and outer exercise, movement and stillness, in order to avoid being troubled by deficiency.

During quiet sitting, when you sense the breathing always being in the heels, this seems to be what Chuang-tzu meant when he said, 'Real people breathe from their heels.'

Producing heat within the body may not be easy at first, but eventually you can do it wherever you want—think of heat and there is heat! But this is nothing more than one type of state that occurs in the course of cultivating refinement—it is certainly not the ultimate goal of practice.

Lin I-min

Lin I-min studied with over thirty teachers, including Buddhists as well as Taoists of both Northern and Southern schools.

As it is also possible to attain the Way by individual cultivation of clear calm, why necessarily long for paired cultivation of yin and yang?

In advanced old age, the source of vitality dries up, so it is necessary to use a method of energizing first, to restore the positive energy. Therefore the true Southern School is a temporary method for elderly practitioners who have no alternative.

Any of the apertures can stop thoughts—there is no hard and fast rule. Generally, focus on apertures in the head, such as the bridge of the nose, should only be done for three months, no more; if you focus more than a year, that will cause illness!

The practice of focusing on apertures should be done without force or obsession, neither forgetting nor fostering. In the case of those who suffer from leakage, it is all right to focus somewhat intently on the perineum.

In Taoist practice there are six apertures altogether. Depending on a person's physical constitution and stage of development, the application and function of the apertures are not the same. At a certain stage it is appropriate to focus on a certain apertures—you should ask an enlightened teacher for directions; don't focus arbitrarily, at random. Then whenever you shift from one aperture to another, the aperture formerly focused on should be abandoned and not used.

There are many ways of arriving at 'mental fasting, sitting forgetting,' such as counting your breaths, focusing on an aperture, holding a spell, reciting the name of a Buddha, performing prostrations, stopping and seeing, maintaining seriousness, and so on. You may choose one to practice. The one that suits you is the best method for the individual.

'Mental fasting, sitting forgetting' is the practice of cultivating realization throughout; from the very outset to the final finish, you cannot do without this.

The stages of opening the passes can be divided into three:

1. Pseudo opening of the passes—energy travels along the skin, so the heat is only on the surface

2. Real opening of the passes—energy travels inside the marrow, so the heat can also penetrate the bones

3. Alchemical opening of the passes—with the Southern School's paired yin-yang practice, there is always concern about leaking the elixir; with individual practice of clear quietude, there is no such danger

When there are thoughts, that is the conscious spirit; when there are no thoughts, that is the original spirit.

Twin cultivation of essence and life is the highest principle.

Taoism and Buddhism may be different but really they're the same.

Just as a clay pot isn't useful unless you fire it, you can't become an immortal by focusing thought on the physical body. However, even if you see essence and clarify the mind, if your energy channels aren't opening and the passes aren't penetrated, how can the teaching continue to work and the life of wisdom survive?

The Taoist method of twin cultivation of essence and life can be divided into three stages with nine steps:

1. First stage—refining the self.

- First step—stabilizing quietude.
- Second step—refining vitality into energy.
- Third step—eliminating the three parasites (opening the eight channels).

2. Second stage—refining the elixir.

- Fourth step—focus on the center (the aperture of the mysterious pass).
- Fifth step—restoring the elixir.
- Sixth step—refining energy into spirit.

3. Third stage—cultivating emptiness.

- Seventh step—nurturing the spirit.
- Eighth step—refining the spirit into emptiness.
- Ninth step—refining emptiness to merge with the Way.

The first step, stabilizing quietude, is identical to Buddhist ‘meditation.’

Buddhists and Taoists of both Southern and Northern Schools equally need to practice this. It resembles the usual method of quiet sitting, but is a little different. The ultimate essential point is that during quiet sitting you don’t

tune the breath or circulate energy, and you do not observe the mind. You should fast mentally, sitting forgetting, completely oblivious of self.

Though various experiences occur in quietude, all you can do is just let them occur naturally. If thoughts occur, don't let the mind be aroused with them, but don't forcibly suppress them. As Chuang-tzu said, 'If you don't control the mind, the mind won't be right; but if you forcibly restrain the mind, it still won't be right.' This is the most basic method of practice Taoists and Buddhists use to cultivate essence. You can see the effects after a month of practice—appetite increases, illness decreases, the vital spirit is clear and refreshed, you have a lot of strength and are less fatigued, your heart and belly feel empty and pleasant (fat around the midriff is reduced), blood pressure is regulated (the high is lowered, the low is raised). Practice this once every day, for an hour a day. (Beginners can start from twenty minutes and gradually increase).

The second step, refining vitality into energy, is identical to the Buddhist 'treasury of the eye,' which Taoists call 'turning the light around and reflecting back.' This is what Lao-tzu calls 'observing the subtle without desire, watching an aperture with intent.' The previously outlined method of stabilizing quietude was 'observing the subtle without desire,' while this

step of refining vitality into energy is ‘watching an aperture with intent.’

How do you watch an aperture?

The Clear Pure Branch (Northern Branch) and the Grafting Branch (Southern School) are not the same. Generally speaking, those under sixty years of age should practice the Northern Branch; over the age of sixty it is useless to practice the Northern Branch.

The third step, eliminating the three parasites, means opening the eight channels. Taoist literature says that there are three parasitic spirits in the human body, living in the brain, belly, and feet. They deplete people’s vital energy, so life can be prolonged by eliminating them. Ancient medical tests list eight extra channels in the human body that are closed; spiritual immortals open them by certain methods, thus can prolong life.

It has been said that reading medical books is useless if you don’t know the eight extraordinary channels. Chinese medical science originally derived from Taoists, so many of the famous physicians of ancient times knew the science of alchemy. By opening the eight channels in your own body, you can experience the circulation in the meridians and the phenomena associated with illness.

In eliminating the three parasites, opening the eight channels, the first step is opening the passive and active channels in order to eliminate the parasitic spirit in the back of the brain. Next is opening the other channels, connecting the central chamber to the soles of the feet, then going up the outer legs to join the active channel, thus eliminating the parasitic spirit in the feet as well.

This step is the same in the practices of both Southern and Northern schools. When opening the eight channels, you go down the inside of the legs to the ‘welling spring’ in the soles of the feet. Once the eight channels are open, you can extend your years, increasing your life span; you have a sweet taste in your mouth, your mental state is composed, your spiritual light subtly shows, and your elixir field is always warm.

The Confucians’ ‘quiet sitting’ and the Taoists’ ‘stable quietude’ can both repel illness.

Focus on apertures is not orthodox Taoist teaching, nor is stopping and seeing orthodox Buddhist teaching. Thirteen hundred years ago the founder of T’ien-t’ai Buddhism introduced the Taoist method of focusing into

Buddhist meditation. Taoists speak of focusing on the aperture in the lower elixir field, while T'ien-t'ai Buddhists call it focusing the mind below the navel. Taoists speak of focusing on the apertures in the upper elixir field, while T'ien-t'ai Buddhists speak of the mind being stationed between the eyebrows. This kind of method is especially popular in contemporary China and Japan, but it is not a high art; it is just easy to learn, that's all.

'Mental fasting, sitting forgetting' is a process everyone must practice, no matter whether they are Taoist or Buddhist, or what school they follow, or whether they are cultivating essence or cultivating life. That is because when quietude reaches the ultimate, then the original spirit appears; as long as you have not reached ultimate quietude, you are still doing things with the conscious spirit. As long as the original spirit is not manifest, all cultivation winds up like bubbles and shadows. Lao-tzu said, 'Have no desire, in order to observe the subtle.' The subtle refers to the state where the original spirit manifests.

When quietude reaches its ultimate extent, you naturally perceive the original face. When you perceive your original face, then you realize how valuable the life of wisdom is, and how insensate emptiness is equivalent to polishing a tile to make a mirror. So you shouldn't become disheartened

fearing difficulty—if you can really start from the orthodox method of ‘mental fasting, sitting forgetting,’ then you will be able to perceive your own original face in six months to a year. If you abandon this for some other shortcut, then ‘the Way is nearby, but you seek it afar,’ and you may train intensely for thirty or forty years without necessarily being able to see the truth.

Recognition of the original face is not a matter of whether you are Taoist or Buddhist, whether you cultivate essence or life, or whether you cultivate both essence and life together—in any case you need to awaken first. Otherwise, it is like chewing an iron bun—there is no way to get your teeth into it.

Practice without awakening is blind practice; awakening without practice is the same as empty awakening. Buddhism values sudden awakening, Taoism values gradual practice. But both before and after awakening you need gradual practice—don’t crave the heights and rush for the remote.

There is a Taoist saying, ‘If you steal the Way, you cannot attain the Way.’

The method of tuning the breathing can be done at any time. Straighten your body and loosen your belt. Counting either exhalations or inhalations, count from one to ten, from a hundred to a thousand, keeping your mind on the count, not letting it scatter. When mind and breath rest on each other and random thoughts do not arise, then stop counting and be natural.

Sun Ching-yang

Sun Ching-yang was a specialist in traditional Chinese medicine for the eyes.

When you practice the Way, you have to simplify involvements, simplifying and simplifying until finally you have none. If you practice diligently without any affairs to be concerned about, then your mind does not race outside. Whether you focus on the central field or the lower field, if you practice for a long time, then even if you have not gotten a true transmission, you can still generate warmth in the lower field, so that positive energy will arise and open the passes and the apertures.

If you are not getting results, it may be that you are too busy to make much effort. Ancestor Lu wrote, ‘To serve reality and practice the way, keep balance and harmony. For an iron rod to become a needle takes grinding

and polishing. This task basically involves no great skill; it just requires daily application and a lot of effort.' If you don't make much effort, how can you progress?

When martial artists practice the 'horse step,' they focus their minds on the lower abdomen and silently tune their inner breathing. If they practice morning, noon, and night consistently, then people under forty years of age can generate warmth in the lower abdomen within four months, and then go on from there to open the passes and apertures. This method produces more physical strength and endurance than opening the passes by means of quiet sitting.

Stilling the spirit in the center and tuning the breathing is the method of returning to the origin, going back to the source. If one can focus steadily on the central elixir field, then the basic positive vital energy in the lower elixir field will develop spontaneously, growing to the point where the waterwheel will go through of itself, without seeking.

The methods of opening the passes and apertures may be resolved into seven techniques; practitioners may choose freely among them, according to which is most suitable to their nature.

1. Focus on the center: there are many methods of opening the passes, but essentially it is most appropriate to start from 'focus on the center.' Resting the spirit in the primal opening, you gather the primal. The method is calm gazing, steadying the spirit in the 'central elixir field.' It doesn't matter whether you tune your breathing or not. When the lower abdomen generates warmth, ethereal positive vital energy can thrust and surge. Sometimes while sitting the penis suddenly erects without any sexual thoughts—when this experience occurs, then you are about to open the passes and apertures.

2. Calmly gazing on the central field: at the beginning of quiet sitting, first silence the mind and get rid of thoughts. When you reach the point where not a single thought arises, both eyes calmly gaze into the central elixir field, with spirit and intent also stationed here at the same time. But don't tune the breathing.

3. Calmly focusing inside the navel: calmly gazing, concentrate the spirit inside the navel, without tuning the breathing.

4. Tuning the breathing while focused on the navel: calmly gazing, concentrate the spirit inside the navel while continuously tuning the breathing.
5. Calmly focusing on the lower elixir field: calmly gazing, concentrate the spirit within 1.3 inches under the navel, without tuning the breathing.
6. Tuning the breathing while focused on the lower field: calmly gazing, concentrate the spirit within 1.3 inches under the navel while continuously tuning the breathing.
7. Focus on the perineum: calmly gazing, concentrate the spirit in the perineum. The perineum is where the passive and active channels meet.

With these seven methods, if you can concentrate calmly and cultivate refinement, your lower abdomen will naturally generate warmth, and energetic potential will naturally be activated. When it thrusts into the coccyx and opens it up, then rises up the back and descends down the front, the passes and apertures open.

The Realized Man Pai Yu-chan said, “True Buddhism is the Tao; two embrace the same one child.”

The Realized Man Ch'en Shang-yang said, “To cultivate the restorative elixir, you must first accumulate hidden virtue. To give without expecting anything is hidden virtue. To do good works without anyone knowing is hidden virtue. Not pressuring people in straits is hidden virtue. Lending secret assistance is hidden virtue. The *Classic of Hidden Virtue* says, ‘When others bring trouble, I come back with blessings; when others bring grudges, I come back with generosity. This is fullness of hidden virtue.’”

If you want to open the mysterious pass, it is of primary importance to have no thoughts. It is not only when you are sitting quietly that your mind should be quiet and have no thoughts; your mind should be quiet and have no thoughts at all times and in all places. Moreover, you should not let anything disturb your mind. If you can be like this in youth or in your prime, then the mysterious pass will surely open up.

When you’ve worked on this effectively and the mysterious pass opens up, and you spontaneously feel a sense of immense openness and clarity, then there is always spiritual light in the opening. The spiritual light is also

called the open spirit, the true mind, or the lamp of the mind. The expression 'lamp' refers to its constant light.

When this opening is connected to the crimson chamber of the heart in the front, and connected to the midspine in the back, and thence to the brain, the mysterious pass is always illumined. This is what is referred to by the story that Buddha realized enlightenment on seeing the morning star, and what Buddhism calls illumining the mind and seeing its essential nature.

There are, however, very few people who can awaken and see through while they are still young or in the prime of life and their human emotions are at their most intense. Even if there are such people, those among them who refine their minds to unadulterated purity and sit there without a single thought arising are the few among the few.

For elderly practitioners, whose positive energy is less and negative energy more, it is even more difficult to stop thoughts. It is said to take at least eight to ten years before one can open the mysterious pass. The light of essential nature only appears when not a single thought arises; the moment the senses stir it is veiled by clouds. Under these conditions, what is better

than to practice life exercises first, by which one can experience rapid results.

The way to do this is to still the spirit and tune the breathing all the time. When positive energy arises at living midnight, gather it in, circulate it, and transmute it. Not only this, but all the methods of activating the waterwheel belong to the category of life exercises. Once the exercises take effect and the waterwheel is operative, then thoughts stop spontaneously without being stopped, and the mysterious pass opens spontaneously without being opened.

What is more, if you cultivate essence without cultivating life, even if you reach the point where you clarify the mind and see its essential nature, in the end you cannot avoid deterioration, aging, and death. As you deteriorate and age, the light of essential nature gradually dims, until it becomes totally imperceptible, no different from an ordinary person.

Now when you practice life exercises, you still cannot give up the practice of refining the mind for a moment. The purer the practice of refining the mind, the higher the accumulated achievement of life exercises. This is how intimately related essence and life exercises are.

Natural Standing Practice

Eyes half open, not looking outside, not listening outside, quiet the mind, put thoughts to rest, forget everything entirely.

Loosening your belt, stand with your legs apart, even with the shoulders. Head, body, back, waist, and arms all straight, both hands hanging down, you stand with your legs slightly bent. This is called the ‘standing post,’ or the ‘standing horse.’

If your legs get numb, stand straight up and rest, then resume the standing horse posture, alternating back and forth. Do this for twenty minutes altogether, or at least fifteen minutes. If you can continue for twenty-five or thirty minutes, that is best.

Do this every day regularly, and the basic energy in your lower abdomen will naturally increase, while your legs will naturally grow stronger. If you can go on from there to gradually increase to forty minutes or an hour, then a hundred ailments will vanish.

When you practice this, you should be warmly dressed—don't let the chill of the wind get to you. When you practice the 'post' method for a long time, you naturally inhale more of the positive energy in the air than you exhale—this is the way from death to life.

Professor Yuan-tun

Professor Yuan-tun was a famous expert on the classics of Taoist spiritual alchemy.

Weather, location, society, diet, and other factors are intimately connected with the practice of quiet sitting; it is not just a matter of having a quiet room.

People who practice sitting may have individual experiences from time to time that are beyond the scope of the alchemical classics; therefore it is imperative to work with a highly experienced and knowledgeable guide in order to get rid of biases and straighten out. This is an enormous task, involving deliberate effort, that is to be cultivated and realized in actual reality, not like tall tales of philosophy and psychology.

Whenever you deliberately focus attention on one aperture, it is comparatively easy to see the effects; when attention is scattered, it is hard to produce results. This is generally the experience of those who practice this exercise.

Circulating energy and tuning the breathing are basically two separate things, not to be mixed up. If you try to circulate energy without mastering the method, there is danger of exhaustion, swelling of the kidneys, and abdominal pains. This is not true of tuning the breathing—there are no such dangers as these.

When things come up, deal with them; when they're gone, they're gone. When beginners try to practice this, they find it isn't easy at all.

The method of stabilization requires that inner energy not get out, while outer energies don't get in.

Sitting up straight, not moving or swaying, letting it be natural, not forcing—this is called tuning the breathing. If you do deep breathing to make sure it reaches the elixir field, then you are doing it consciously; not only will you be unable to tune your breathing, you may even make yourself ill.

The practices of concentrating the mind between the eyebrows or concentrating the mind in the elixir field below the navel have side effects and should not be used constantly or permanently, lest they bring on illness.

For elderly people, what is important in practice is replenishing loss, so it's good to sleep a lot. If you sit for a long time without sleeping, that is not appropriate for the first half of practice; if you force yourself to do it, that will not necessarily be beneficial. Here is a difference between Taoism and Ch'an.

Sometimes the body seems to disappear; this sort of phenomenon is commonly experienced by those who practice quieting exercises, so there's no need for alarm.

The combination of yin and yang within one's body is slow to take effect and has little power, but it is easy to practice. The combination of yin and yang involving another and self is quick to take effect and is very powerful, but it is hard to practice. Moreover, there are various differences within the practice of twin cultivation of yin and yang:

1. There is that which benefits both other and self.
2. There is that which greatly benefits oneself without harming the other at all.

(These two secrets have been passed on secretly by spiritual immortals over the ages, and are never made public).

3. There is that in which benefit and harm to self and other are mutually adjusted. This is the art of sexual hygiene practiced by men and women of the intelligentsia in ancient times.
4. There is that which harms others to benefit oneself. This is the practice of charlatans without guidance or virtue, and also the practice of the perverted and the deranged.
5. There is that which harms oneself but benefits another. This happens when one's partner is on a higher level than oneself, and while one tries to borrow from the other, one is imperceptibly used by the other.
6. There is that which harms both other and self. This is on account of mistakenly entering a side track on account of ignorance, moral depravity, and lack of authentic instruction.

The ancient method of practice was always for husband and wife to cultivate realization together, mentally and morally in harmony, beyond mundane feelings. This is very different from the system of segregation of the sexes. Liu Kang and Fan Yun-ch'iao are the most famous of couples who practiced together. As for Ma Tan-yang and Sun Pu-erh among the seven immortals of the North, they did not escape Buddhist influence, abandoning their home and choosing separate places to practice individually, unlike the model of the ancient immortals.

Yu Yang-tzu

Yu Yang-tzu studied Taoism and Ch'an from youth.

Whenever you become empty and quiet, the eyesight naturally focuses on a certain spot; this is called freezing the spirit. The breathing is naturally even and fine; this is called tuning the breathing. The practice of 'mind stopping below the navel, energy returning below the navel' is one method, but it should not be practiced intently.

When sitting quietly, the vital spirit should be concentrated, but if concentration is not right, it easily produces illness, so it is imperative to be careful. Reducing the sphere of attention to one focal point, it should be neither inside nor outside, not totally directed internally. In other words, when focusing on an internal aperture within the body, like the cave of emptiness, it is imperative to be empty, relaxed, and natural; otherwise it is hard to avoid creating obstacles.

According to the Western Sect, one should concentrate on the perineum for a while, then go back to the 'cave of energy,' not necessarily concentrating fixedly from beginning to end. When you come to the point where 'mind and breath rest on each other,' neither inside nor outside, there naturally

appears a point; spontaneously focusing on this point is the highest method of focusing on an aperture. But one should only keep the mind on this point, not follow the breath mentally; eventually the breathing will naturally rest on the mind.

Taoism is concerned with both body and mind, while Buddhism despises the body as a 'stinking skin bag.' Taoists concentrate on apertures, whereas Buddhists do not. Concentrating on apertures has a significant relationship to physical health; this is neglected by not concentrating on apertures. This is the overall difference between Buddhism and Taoism.

Once you sense a realm of clear emptiness, this is the first sign of having obtaining primal unified energy. At this time you should immediately gather this energy and concentrate it in the lair of spirit and energy; otherwise you will miss out.

Practitioners of the Way should above all avoid using the brain. If you have no choice, the less you use it the better.

When energy thrusts into the treasury of the heart, this is called 'opening the aperture.' When energy penetrates the three passes, this is called

‘opening the passes.’ These experiences are felt with exceptional keenness by some people, but some people don’t feel them so much—one cannot generalize.

T’ai-chi-ch’uan is beneficial for the Way, and is suitable as an assisting practice.

Massage the waist and the ‘welling spring’ opening in the soles of the feet—regular practice of this can help the Way.

When the waterwheel goes into operation, the chest should be cool, while the back should be warm.

When opening the active channel, the spine may be slightly warm inside, or it might feel hot as boiling water—this differs according to the individual, so no overall generalization can be made.

When positive energy rises into the brain, don’t be alarmed if there is dizziness; remain calm and empty, or use the will to draw it down, and the spirit and the intellect can be cleared.

As a daily routine, one should sit quietly at least once every morning and evening. If there is an interruption, it's alright to sit more.

In the practice of the Southern School, even if you can obtain medicine from the 'other,' you still have to practice clear calm, embracing the fundamental and maintaining unity, returning to emptiness and reverting to nothingness, before you're finished; otherwise, it will vanish like an ephemera on the verge of attainment.

Yun-you-tzu

Yun-you-tzu devoted himself to Taoist studies from boyhood. He emphasized the unity of Buddhism and Taoism.

Practitioners should lead an orderly life. With thoughts stilled and the spirit steady while walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, what is most important is to practice stabilization time and again.

When first practicing quiet sitting, you should sit frequently, though each period of sitting doesn't have to be too long; five minutes, fifteen minutes, half an hour—these will all do. If you get up at three o'clock in the morning to sit, the effect is greatest; one hour at this time can be the equivalent of five hours.

Generally speaking, all incurable diseases, like tuberculosis and cancer, can be cured by means of the primal energy that alchemists can control, letting it pour in through the crown of the head, producing a sense of clarity and well-being.

The twelve passes and apertures in the human body, from the point of view of modern physiology, are places where there are concentrations of nerves,

or nerve bundles. Focus on any of them can produce warmth; when the warmth circulates, it naturally opens the passes and apertures.

Immortalist exercises require flexibility; if you stick dogmatically to verbal instructions, you'll never achieve anything. Alchemical classics are worth studying, but don't stick to the forms too much.

Breathing exercises can be practiced along with quiet sitting. However, when expelling air through the mouth, it is necessary to bend the waist, like a cat arching its back, meanwhile contracting the lower abdomen, so as to be able to expel all the air from your lungs. Also, breathing in through the nose, when your lungs are nearly full, you should press downward to distend the lower abdomen. This makes for exercise of the internal organs. If you practice this for a long time, it can cure stomach illness.

For various kinds of cancer there is still no treatment in all the world that is most effective. During quiet sitting, if you can work intensely focusing the vital spirit on the afflicted part, pursuing this day after day, eventually the disease will spontaneously remit.

Wolfberry steeped in wine is called life-prolonging wine. The proportions are four ounces of wolfberry to a bottle of rice wine, with an ounce of fleeceflower root. Taken over a long period of time, this can cure many illnesses; what is more, the face will have no wrinkles, and seniors will have no need of reading glasses. It is not good to drink too much, however. There is a monk in Japan who is a hundred and eight years old and can still climb Mt. Fuji, Japan's highest mountain. Every evening he regularly drinks a small cup of wolfberry wine. That's how effective this is. It is said that this wine is especially good for those with excess stomach acid.

In sum:

- T'ai-chi-ch'uan is exercise for the tendons and muscles.
- Breathing is exercise for the internal organs.
- The waterwheel, or energy circulation, is exercise for the nerves.
- Taking medicinal wine has nutritional effects.

Modern psychology has concluded that the human storage consciousness remembers the events of a lifetime, like the tape of a tape recorder.

The more science progresses, the more clearly we understand Immortalism and Buddhism. So we realize that the statements of the classics of

immortalism and the scriptures of Buddhism all have a scientific basis, and are definitely not superstitions.

When the mind is not pure, everything you see is illusory. What is illusory should not be taken in. If your mind is pure, and you see as if unseeing, as if there yet not there, then these are not illusory appearances but subtleties. Take in subtleties, and they may benefit you.

Below the heart and above the navel—this is called ‘the compass center.’

But the lower elixir field is the ‘alchemical furnace,’ and in the first step of exercise it is better to focus on the lower field.

At first one should use the life-prolonging arts to activate energetic potential. Once the energetic potential is activated, then one should go along with the natural circulation of that energetic potential.

People cultivating realization should sleep a full eight hours. This is still true when you’re incubating the elixir.

Ingesting energy means restoring primal basic energy. If you practice it diligently day and night, you can go without cooked food.

When your work is too busy and you're too tired, you shouldn't try to practice internal alchemy. For elderly practitioners, it's best to sleep a lot.

For elderly practitioners whose generative function has deteriorated, it is appropriate to focus on the perineum. For young practitioners it is the opposite—it's better not to focus on any aperture at all.

Elderly practitioners should practice the technique of drawing up the rectum often, using pure attention to lead back to the coccyx.

For cultivating realization, at first it's important to refine the self. This means having inner control and not being seduced by externals.

Before clearing the passes, it is appropriate to use the martial fire; once the passes are cleared, it is appropriate to use the cultural fire. In other words, before energy has been generated, one should use eye and spirit to watch it attentively; once energy has been generated, then one should relax and not watch, instead incubating it with the cultural fire that seems to be there while seeming not to be.

Sitting quietly, gazing inward, when you can see a single empty blankness inside the body, this is the inner experience of the completion of the major cycle.

Practitioners who are elderly or impotent should go into the mountains for quiet cultivation, absorbing the pure ethereal energy of the mountain forests; then they can recover their potency.

Those whose energy has declined and are impotent should steady the spirit in the brain in order to revive their sexual potency.

Practitioners of quiet sitting should not become obsessed with it or seek results too much. One should be completely natural, like water flowing, like flowers blooming; otherwise the fire of ignorance will flare, and desire for gain will instead produce loss.